

# Charles Palissot

## *The Philosophes*



EDITED AND TRANSLATED JESSICA GOODMAN ET AL.

# *THE PHILOSOPHES*



*The Philosophes*  
by Charles Palissot

*Edited by Jessica Goodman & Olivier Ferret*

*Translated by Jessica Goodman, Caitlin Gray,  
Felicity Gush, Phoebe Jackson, Nina Ludekens,  
Rosie Rigby & Lorenzo Edwards-Jones*





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Jean-Antoine Houdon, terracotta bust of Charles Palissot de Montenoy, 1779. Reading Room of the Bibliothèque Mazarine, Paris. Photo by Marie-Lan Nguyen, Wikimedia, CC 2.0, [https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Buste\\_de\\_Charles\\_Palissot\\_de\\_Montenoy\\_par\\_Houdon\\_Bibliotheque\\_Mazarine\\_Paris\\_n2.jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Buste_de_Charles_Palissot_de_Montenoy_par_Houdon_Bibliotheque_Mazarine_Paris_n2.jpg)

# Introduction<sup>1</sup>

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Charles Palissot de Montenoy was born on 3 January 1730, and lived until the age of eighty-four. Despite his long life, and the publication of at least sixteen plays, poems and treatises, if he is remembered at all today it is for his 1760 play, *Les Philosophes*. This satirical attack on Diderot and the other authors of the *Encyclopédie*,<sup>2</sup> best known for a scene in which a caricature of Jean-Jacques Rousseau enters the stage on all fours eating leaves, was at the centre of a bitter literary and political quarrel in the early 1760s, which resulted in its author losing his protectors and his literary reputation.<sup>3</sup>

According to his own *Mémoires*, Palissot was destined to enter the church, taking a philosophy degree aged just eleven.<sup>4</sup> However, at the age of sixteen he wrote his first tragedy, and two years later he produced *Zarès*, which was performed at the Comédie-Française in 1751. It was during the production of this play that he first became closely linked to the Comte de Stainville (later the Duc de Choiseul),<sup>5</sup> who as his protector would introduce him to the Princesse de Robecq<sup>6</sup> and the Comtesse de

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- 1 Parts of this introduction are a direct translation (by Jessica Goodman) from Olivier Ferret's *Préface* to his 2002 edition (*La Comédie des Philosophes et autres textes* (Sainte-Étienne: Publications de l'Université de Sainte-Étienne, 2002)), which also contains a number of the 'quarrel' texts. Translations from Ferret are signalled by the use of italics. T.J. Barling's introduction to his 1975 edition (Exeter: University of Exeter Press, 1975) was vital in providing supplementary information about the play's performance and publication.
  - 2 For an online version of the *Encyclopédie*, see <https://encyclopedia.uchicago.edu/>. A translation of many articles can be found here: <https://quod.lib.umich.edu/d/did/>
  - 3 Gregory S. Brown, *A Field of Honor: Writers, Court Culture, and Public Theater in French Literary Life from Racine to the Revolution* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2005), pp. 168–69.
  - 4 *Mémoires sur la vie de l'auteur* in *Œuvres de M. Palissot* (Liège: Clément Plomteux, 1777), I, pp. x–xxxix.
  - 5 Étienne François, Duc de Choiseul (1719–1785), Foreign minister of France between 1758–1761 and 1766–1770.
  - 6 Anne-Marie de Montmorency-Luxembourg (1729–1760), who became Louis XV's mistress in 1749.

la Marck.<sup>7</sup> All three would play significant roles in the later story of *Les Philosophes*.

In 1753, Palissot, along with Fréron<sup>8</sup> (another significant figure in his later life), was received by the Académie de Nancy. The Académie had been created by King Stanislas,<sup>9</sup> the dedicatee of Palissot's incomplete *L'Histoire des rois de Rome* (1753); a text that his biographer, Daniel Delafarge, describes as inspired by the very same contemporary philosophy that Palissot would later critique.<sup>10</sup> In the autumn of the following year, his comedy *Les Tuteurs* was successfully performed at the Comédie-Française, and published with a preface dedicated to the Comtesse de la Marck.

## Palissot and the Anti-Philosophes

The 1760 *Les Philosophes* was not Palissot's first foray into satire. In 1755 he created a scandal with his *Le Cercle ou les originaux*, which brought to the stage of Nancy's main theatre — among other things — an educated woman, an infatuated poet, and Rousseau, the 'philosophe'. Rousseau appeared under the guise of 'Blaise-Nicodème le Cosmopolite', who is accused of putting forward 'des paradoxes bizarres' (scene viii) to no philosophical end, but solely to make himself a name. The 'cercle' of the title is a group of writers creating an encyclopaedia. The play therefore marked Palissot's first direct attack on the 'sect' that would be his target in the later play: Diderot and d'Alembert as editors of the *Encyclopédie*, as well as Helvétius, Rousseau, and other exponents of the 'new philosophy' of the period, which claimed to use scientific method and reason to re-evaluate the dogmatic pronouncements of the past. *Le Cercle* incited a general outcry from the authors of the *Encyclopédie*, as well as demands that Palissot should be expelled from the Nancy Académie. The Princesse de Robecq intervened in Palissot's favour; King Stanislas, on the other

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7 Louise-Marguerite, Comtesse de la Marck (1730–1820), wife of Charles Marie Raymond d'Arenberg (1721–1778), 5<sup>th</sup> Duke of Arenberg and an Austrian Field Marshal.

8 Élie-Catherine Fréron (1718–1776), literary critic and author of the *Année littéraire*, continued by his son, Stanislas.

9 King Stanislas Leszczyński (1677–1766), King of Poland, Duke of Lorraine, and a count of the Holy Roman Empire.

10 Daniel Delafarge, *La Vie et l'œuvre de Palissot (1730–1814)* (Paris: Hachette, 1912).

hand, was more minded to side with his detractors; with the result that the finished 1756 edition of the *Histoire des rois de Rome* was no longer dedicated to the King, but instead to the Comtesse de la Marck.

The reaction of the encyclopédistes further stoked Palissot's ire. In 1757, he published his *Petites lettres sur les grands philosophes* (dedicated to the *Princesse de Robecq*), in which he mocked this 'sect' of wise men, reserving his most scathing attacks for Diderot and his play *Le Fils naturel*, which he critiqued roundly, in particular accusing it (incorrectly) of being plagiarised from the Italian author Carlo Goldoni.<sup>11</sup> Following the publication of the *Petites lettres*, two translations of Goldoni's play appeared, which included false dedications to Madame la Princesse de \*\*\*\*\* and Madame la Comtesse de \*\*\*; thinly-veiled references to Palissot's two protectors (who, along with Choiseul, had also recently had to bail Palissot out financially). These translations embarrassed both Palissot and his patrons, and — convinced that Diderot was the perpetrator — he made him the central target of his later play.

Palissot's campaign was taken up by other critics of modern philosophy. In the period 1757–1758, whilst public interest was still occupied with the failed assassination attempt on Louis XV by former soldier and domestic servant Damiens,<sup>12</sup> the Abbé Giry of Saint-Cyr<sup>13</sup> and the lawyer Moreau<sup>14</sup> orchestrated the 'Cacouacs' campaign, which presented the philosophes as a group of irritating barbarians.<sup>15</sup> The Jansenists also threw in their tuppence-worth: the strongest critiques came from one Abraham Chaumeix,<sup>16</sup> who took it upon himself to defend religion from the *Encyclopédie*, first in his *Préjugés*

11 *Petites lettres sur les grands philosophes*, in *Œuvres*, II, pp. 99–151. On the plagiarism row see Pierre Frantz, 'Un hôte mal attendu: Goldoni, Diderot, Voltaire', *Revue d'histoire du théâtre*, 177 (1993), 55–66.

12 Robert-François Damiens (1715–1757) was the last person to be executed in France by drawing and quartering, the traditional punishment for regicide. On this attack and its consequences, see Pierre Rétat, ed., *L'Attentat de Damiens. Discours sur l'événement au XVIIIe siècle* (Paris: Editions du CNRS, Lyons).

13 Joseph Giry Saint-Cyr (1699–1761), clergyman.

14 Jacob-Nicolas Moreau (1717–1803), lawyer, journalist, and historian.

15 The first 'Mémoire sur les Cacouacs' appeared in the journal the *Mercure de France* in October 1757; Moreau took up the campaign again with a 'Nouveau mémoire pour servir à l'histoire des Cacouacs', and in the following year Giry de Saint-Cyr published a 'Catéchisme et décisions des cas de conscience à l'usage des Cacouacs'. See edition by Gehradt Stenger, *L'Affaire des Cacouacs: trois pamphlets contre les philosophes des Lumières* (Saint-Étienne: Publications de l'Université de Sainte-Étienne, 2004).

16 Abraham-Joseph de Chaumeix (1725–1773), critic.



légitimes, published in 1758–1759, and later, with d'Acquin,<sup>17</sup> in a journal entitled the *Censeur hebdomadaire*. Chaumeix's efforts, moreover, were abetted by members of the Paris Parliament, especially the lawyer general Joly de Fleury.<sup>18</sup> Following the parliamentary arrêt (judgement) of 6 February 1759 that censured Helvetius's *De l'esprit*,<sup>19</sup> this many-fronted attack came to head with the publication of a new arrêt against the *Encyclopédie* from the State Council of the King. An earlier arrêt, on 7 February 1752, had officially suppressed the first two volumes, though without much noticeable effect on the enterprise as a whole; this latest document revoked the publication privilege entirely:

*His Majesty has been informed that the authors of the said work, taking advantage of the indulgence they have thus far received, have produced five new volumes, which are no less scandalous than the preceding ones, and which have already raised the ire of the public ministers of the parliament. His Majesty has therefore judged, based on these repeated abuses, that it is no longer possible to let the said privilege continue; that the advantages to be gained from a work of this nature for the progress of the sciences and the arts can never outweigh the irreparable damage it does to morals and to religion.*<sup>20</sup>

The philosophes therefore seemed to be in a difficult position, marked symbolically by the retirement of d'Alembert from the encyclopaedic enterprise.<sup>21</sup> At the start of the following year, the quarrel was taken up once again, this time at the Académie Française. Following the death of Maupertuis,<sup>22</sup> his vacant seat was taken up on 10 March 1760 by Jean-Jacques Lefranc de Pompignan,<sup>23</sup> whose inaugural speech was a diatribe against the philosophes:

*If it were true that in the century in which we live, in this century drunk on the spirit of philosophy and on the love of the arts, the abuse of talents, a scorn for*

17 Pierre-Louis D' Aquin De Chateau-Lyon (1720–1796), author of the *Siècle littéraire de Louis XV* (1754).

18 Joseph Omer Joly de Fleury (1715–1810).

19 Claude Adrien Helvétius (1715–1771), whose *De l'esprit* was published in 1758 — translated into English as *Essays on the Mind* (Bristol: Thoemmes Press, 2000). On the quarrel around the 1758 publication of *De l'esprit*, see David Warner Smith, *Helvétius: A Study in Persecution* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1965).

20 Arrêt of the State Council of the King, 8 March 1759, p. 1.

21 On the effects of the revocation of the *Encyclopédie* privilege, see Jacques Proust, *Diderot et l'Encyclopédie* (Paris: Armand-Colin, 1962), pp. 78–79.

22 Pierre Louis Maupertuis (1698–1759), mathematician and eventual director of the Académie de Sciences.

23 Jean-Jacques Lefranc, Marquis de Pompignon (1709–1784), author of theatre, poetry, polemics and treatises, among other texts.

*religion, and a hatred of authority were truly the dominant characteristics of our productions, let us not be mistaken, my good sirs, that posterity, that impartial judge of all the centuries, would pronounce its sovereign judgement that we had produced nothing but a false literature and a vain philosophy.*<sup>24</sup>

Having conducted a brief review of the ‘immense number’ of ‘scandalous pamphlets’, of ‘insolent verses’, of ‘frivolous and licentious writings’, and of philosophical and historical texts, Pompignan concluded that ‘all [...] in these books, which are multiplying to infinitude, [carried] the imprint of a depraved literature, of a corrupt morals, of a haughty philosophy, which undermine[d] both the throne and the altar’. This fearless outburst earned the new academician a barrage of criticism: Voltaire set the tone by writing *Les Quand*, which was quickly followed by a whole host of ‘monosyllables’ in prose and verse, which attacked the impudent Pompignan.<sup>25</sup>

## The Birth of the Play

The ensuing fracas had still not quietened when, just before Easter 1760, Palissot sent *Les Philosophes* to the actors of the Comédie-Française. The play rehashed the key accusations made in the earlier texts, presenting the philosophes as an exploitative cabal who advocated adherence to their philosophical way of life out of pure self-advancement; a grouping that was quarrelsome and divided until it came to defending the character or works of any one of its number, and that preferred vague ideas of loving ‘humanity’ over its own kin and countrymen.<sup>26</sup> The plot owes much to Molière’s *Les Femmes savantes* in particular.<sup>27</sup> A group of self-styled ‘philosophes’ (Dortidius, Théophraste, Valère, and their associate and valet-in-disguise, M. Carondas) inveigle their way into the

24 J.-J. Lefranc de Pompignan, *Discours de reception à l’Académie française*, <http://www.academie-francaise.fr/discours-de-reception-et-reponse-de-pierre-cureau-de-la-chambre-0>

25 *Les Quand* and the other texts based around the repetition of an opening monosyllable are referenced in pamphlets that appear later, in response to Palissot’s play, namely: *Petites Réflexions* (Ferret, pp. 153–57 (p. 155)) and *Les Philosophes de bois* (Ferret, pp. 246–60 (p. 25)).

26 Delafarge examines how certain lines are almost direct translations into verse of the prose of Palissot’s earlier *Le Cercle*, pp. 140–41.

27 In Molière’s play, Philaminte is taken in by Trissotin, a false *bel esprit* who persuades her to promise him marriage to her daughter Henriette, all the while only being after her money. His trickery is revealed, as in *Les Philosophes*, through a letter.

household of the rich widow Cydalise, whom they flatter into believing she is a philosophical genius so that she will allow her only daughter, Rosalie, to marry Valère. Rosalie and her lover Damis, along with their servants Marton and Crispin, expose the philosophes for the frauds that they are, and the play ends with reconciliation between mother and daughter, and love matches between both the two young people and the two servants.

This condemnation of the authors of the *Encyclopédie* was therefore the culmination of a campaign that had been waged for three years; a campaign through which its two constituent camps — philosophes and anti-philosophes — were brought into being.<sup>28</sup> Indeed, in his account of the quarrel in his 1762 *Querelles littéraires*, the Abbé Iraitlh noted: 'Of all the means employed to make a society of writers [the *encyclopédistes*] appear hateful, the most violent was the comedy *Les Philosophes*'.<sup>29</sup> Crucially, its attack took place on the stage of the Comédie-Française, rather than in semi-clandestine pamphlets, publicly cementing this distinction between the two groups. Moreover, the political context made it dangerous to call into question the philosophes' respect for the government. Since 1756, France had been engaged in the Seven Years War, and was by this stage in a delicate position following a number of English victories.<sup>30</sup> Passions were running high and, as Grimm<sup>31</sup> highlighted, 'there is no man in power today who does not regard the progress of philosophy amongst us as the source of all our evils and as the cause of most of the problems France has suffered in recent years.'

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- 28 According to d'Aquin, this 'civil war' dated back to 'the strong and insistent speech made by the celebrated M. de Pompignan, in which he so eloquently defended the faith of his fathers and the throne of his masters', but also to 'certain articles published in the *Journal de Trévoux*' (*Le Censeur hebdomadaire*, 5 vols (Utrecht: Dufour, 1760–1795), vol. 3, p. 28). The articles in question were published in January and February 1751 by P. Berthier, following the publication of the prospectus of the *Encyclopédie*, and Diderot responded to them in his *Lettres au R.P. Berthier, Jésuite* (1751).
- 29 [Augustin Simon Iraitlh], *Querelles littéraires, ou Mémoires pour servir à l'Histoire des révolutions de la République des Lettres, depuis Homère jusqu'à nos jours*, 4 vols (Paris: chez Durand, 1761), IV, p. 151.
- 30 The Seven Years' War took place between 1756 and 1763, with the element of the conflict involving England and France largely arising from colonial disputes relating to North America.
- 31 Friedrich Melchior, Baron von Grimm, contributor to the *Encyclopédie* and editor of the *Correspondance littéraire*, from 1753.

*One would think that the reasons that caused us to lose the battles of Rosbach and Minden, and which caused the destruction and the loss of our fleets, are fairly clearly evident. But if you consult the general feeling of the Court, you will be told that it is new philosophy that must be blamed for these problems; and that, moreover, it is this philosophy that has extinguished military spirit, blind submission, and all that which formerly produced great men and glorious actions in France.*

*The impact of the performance of Palissot's play seemed, even at the time, to be indissociable from these political considerations:*

*It is of little importance that Palissot has written a bad comedy, attacking people who are to be respected for both their morals and their talents. But the fact that this farce has been performed in the theatre of Corneille, on the authority of the government; that the police — who, in this country, usually pursue satirical works with a relentless severity — have set aside their principles, and let several citizens be insulted by an atrocious satire: all that is very significant, and illustrates — quite aside from an overturning of all order and all justice — the type of favour and protection that literature and philosophy can henceforward expect from the government.<sup>32</sup>*

*Soon after the first performance of Les Philosophes, Collé, who could not be accused of any particular partiality towards the encyclopédistes, also noted in his Journal that 'this play will go down in history': 'it is the most bitter, bloody, cruel satire that has ever been authorised'.<sup>33</sup>*

*The circumstances of the play's reception by the actors of the French troupe suggest that though it was not strictly a command piece, at the very least there were orders from high up that it should be performed. Any new play had to be accepted by a secret vote of the company members, all of whom were shareholders in the theatre.<sup>34</sup> According to Collé, 'it was Fréron who*

32 *Correspondance littéraire*, 16 vols (Paris: Prault, 1753–1790), IV, pp. 241 (available at <https://artfl-project.uchicago.edu/content/grimms-correspondance-litt%C3%A9raire>).

33 Charles Collé (1709–1783), dramatist. Indeed, in March 1757 he writes in his journal: 'The *Encyclopédistes* are men whose knowledge is broad; they have wit, method, sound judgment — as long as passion does not enter into things — a good style, even warmth at times, but they do not have that which we call 'genius'; in short, they have invented nothing, they have an unfounded pride, and yet they want to effect a domination and tyranny that will never be accepted in the Republic of Letters, in which no citizen will accept a master.' (*Journal et mémoires de Charles Collé*, 3 vols (Paris: Didot Frères, 1868), II, pp. 166–67).

34 The Register of the Comédie-Française simply states, on 22 March 1760, that Palissot's play 'was received according to the rules of the ballot to be performed at



presented and read this play to the troupe, with an audacity that in a less polite century would have been described as impudence. [...] He told them that he was bringing them a play, and that it would be useless to deliberate over its reception, since it would be performed in any case in spite of them'. Collé goes on to note that 'however contemptible Fréron may be, he would never have been so confident without the certainty that he would be backed up: he had authority behind him'.<sup>35</sup> Palissot's play was accepted in the absence of first actress Clairon, who did not hesitate, on her return, to upbraid her colleagues for failing prey to such a villain.<sup>36</sup> We might nonetheless wonder, with Collé, that 'the protection accorded to this play', whilst 'very powerful', 'did not dare to declare itself', and instead 'remained hidden':

Before the performance, the story went that the play was being performed by order of the Dauphin. Today, the prince said expressly, in public, that he did not know the play; that he had not read it. The Duc de Choiseul, who was equally accused of favouring Palissot, also denied it, as if it were a villainous act: both men are distancing themselves from this shameful protection.<sup>37</sup>

However, to question this secrecy would be to forget that it would have been somewhat paradoxical for the Dauphin, whose piety was well known, to declare himself the protector (and by implication the commissioner) of a play, given the immoral light in which the theatre was viewed in the period.<sup>38</sup> As for the Duc de Choiseul, his attitude seems to have been born out of political opportunism: though he wrote to Voltaire on 16 June 1760 that he was 'abandoning [Palissot] to the damnation of philosophy and the philosophes, and perhaps even to the whipping that he deserves', he also noted that 'this series of authorial spats' had nonetheless ultimately been 'useful in

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the opening of the new season' (cited by Delafarge, p. 121).

35 *Journal*, II, pp. 350–52.

36 Clair Joseph Hippolyte Leris, known as La Clairon (1723–1803), Comédie-Française leading actress. On her reaction, as well as other details relating to the performance of the play, see Delafarge, esp. pp. 121–69.

37 *Journal*, II, pp. 352–53.

38 See Abbé Proyart's comments on this point: not content with himself refuting the works of the philosophes, 'enemies of God and the State', and with encouraging 'people in power to use all the weapons of the law against them', the Dauphin 'set against them', in the person of Fréron, 'the most inconvenient enemy they could have wished for in this century, who at every encounter encouraged them to expose the poison within their writings' (*Vie du Dauphin* (Paris: Berton, 1777), pp. 56–59).

serving as a diversion for the Parisian rabble from the real war'; that is, the one happening on the sea, against the English.<sup>39</sup>

## Performance and Reception

*Palissot's play was a real success, attested by both the enemies and the supporters of the philosophes: its first performance on 2 May 1760 drew 1439 spectators, and the main actor had to quieten the crowd before the play could begin. Fréron wrote that 'since the foundation of the theatre we have not seen [...] such great crowds of people. [...] It was a crush, a crowd, a madness like none I have ever known. The works of Corneille, Racine, Molière, Crébillon and Voltaire never drew such attention nor attracted so many spectators nor created so many cabales.'*<sup>40</sup> *D'Acquin said that 'the people laid siege, so to speak, to the doors of the Comédie-Française' and that this play 'excited a curiosity and interest of a level that had never been witnessed, even for the most celebrated dramas'.*<sup>41</sup> *Grimm, meanwhile, stated that 'if the news of a military victory had arrived on the day of the first performance of Les Philosophes, it would have been a loss for the glory of [Lieutenant General] M. de Broglie,*<sup>42</sup> *for no one would have spoken of it'.*<sup>43</sup>

*This is where any consensus breaks down, however. The tone of the reviews that appeared in the periodical press, as well as the first-hand descriptions given in private correspondence, reflect the polarised positions set out in the surrounding pamphlets. D'Acquin celebrated in Palissot 'a comic poet', who could not be ignored by his contemporaries, 'in the context of the growth of irreligion, independence, pride, pomp, betrayal, the confusion of estates, a criminal neglect of those of great talent and a foolish enthusiasm for those of little talent, a general upheaval in the sciences and the arts, which has resulted in certain people gaining an incomprehensible reputation; since, essentially, all manner of other idiocies have reached their peak.'*<sup>44</sup> *Grimm, on the other*

39 D8983. All letters from/to Voltaire are cited using Besterman's numbering system, which is also searchable in <https://www.e-enlightenment.com/index.html>. On the Duc de Choiseul, see in particular Renée Pomeau and Christiane Mervaud, eds, *De la Cour au jardin, 1750–1759* (Oxford: Voltaire Foundation, 1991), p. 369.

40 Elie Cathérine Fréron, *L'Année littéraire, ou, suite des lettres sur quelques écrits de ce temps*, 202 vols (Paris: Lambert, 1754–1790), 1760, III, p. 214.

41 *Le Censeur hebdomadaire*, II, p. 368.

42 Charles-François de Broglie, Marquis de Ruffec (1719–1781), Lieutenant General.

43 *Correspondance littéraire*, IV, p. 368.

44 *Le Censeur hebdomadaire*, II, pp. 381–82.

hand, observed that 'any piquancy to be found in *Les Philosophes* consists in saying that fraud and philosophe are synonyms; in attacking the morals of M. Diderot, M. Helvétius and others; in representing them on stage as criminals and bad citizens, and in making Jean-Jacques Rousseau walk on all fours.' And in sarcastic conclusion: 'however pitiful this play may be in itself, it will go down in history in France, and will prove the truth in the assertion that the most extraordinary events often stem from the most derisory causes.'<sup>45</sup>

Collé expressed the view of the middle ground. 'Palissot's play', he wrote, 'makes a strong impression on most people who go to see it.'

*All the good fathers in the audience applaud it in good faith, and the honest men of the cloth, who attack the government for allowing decent citizens to be portrayed on stage, have nonetheless no compunction in watching the sword of satire fall upon people whose principles — or rather, whose opinions — threaten to turn everything on its head; many people who, without being pious, are still believers, and whom the encyclopédistes, in their works, have confused with idiots for this sole reason, believe themselves avenged by the success of this play. The lower classes add further weight to this side of the argument, and think that they are defending the cause of virtue by attacking the new style of philosophy; they do not realise that the pleasure that they find in seeing it criticised is nothing but a malignant pleasure that they are made to experience in a mechanical fashion; they do not foresee the cruel consequences, for themselves, of making it normal and acceptable to allow the mockery of good citizens.'*<sup>46</sup>

This sketched sociological analysis of the play's reception provides a counterpoint to the views presented by later pamphlets, which often have recourse to pre-existing prejudices.

Critical assessments of the play were most often based on a comparison with the comedies of Molière, an omnipresent reference in the quarrel for Palissot's supporters as much as for his detractors. The Abbé de la Porte,<sup>47</sup> for example, having examined the play, could not help commenting on the 'resemblance' of the plot of *Les Philosophes* to those of *Tartuffe* (1664) and *Les Femmes savantes* (1672). Extending his references to take in Jean-Baptiste Rousseau, Gresset, and Destouches, he added that 'the outline of *Les Philosophes*' is 'very similar to those of *Le Flatteur*, *Le Méchant*, *L'Ingrat*, and generally

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<sup>45</sup> Correspondance littéraire, IV, pp. 240–41.

<sup>46</sup> *Journal*, II, pp. 357–58.

<sup>47</sup> Joseph de La Porte (1714–1779), priest and *homme de lettres*, who worked with Fréron on the *Année littéraire*.

all character comedies'.<sup>48</sup> However, he dismissed the charge of plagiarism that had been put forward by Palissot's enemies, instead evoking the standard characteristics, plots and situations of all such character comedies.<sup>49</sup> Collé, for his part, remarked that 'there is no action, except in the third act [...] everything happens in conversation, but the characters of the philosophes are quite well captured. [...] It must be admitted that they are drawn from nature, albeit with the darkest cunning'.<sup>50</sup>

For though no-one denied that Palissot wrote with a certain amount of wit and style,<sup>51</sup> the key question, bitterly debated throughout the quarrel, was whether or not he had crossed a line between a form of comedy expected to paint its characters 'from nature', and the portrayal of real people, based on easily identifiable original models. On 8 May 1760, Favart wrote that Palissot, by putting on stage 'Diderot, d'Alembert, Rousseau, and all the authors of the *Encyclopédie*', and by ensuring that he not only 'covered them in ridicule' but also 'made them hateful', 'had renewed in this respect the liberties taken by ancient Greek comedy': 'the century of Aristophanes begins again', he confirmed on 24 June. Echoing 'most of the discussions among the audience by people who pride themselves on their impartiality', Favart related this 'licentiousness' to the clear intention of the author:

If he claims to remedy the abuses of philosophy, then he is to be praised for it; but this is not what we can understand from his work; he could have taken a different road; he could have made his critique more general in order to make it more useful; the arrows that he launches, which fall with great accuracy upon the people that he wishes to portray, are clearly only fired in order to serve his personal animosity, for which the principles are obscure, but the ends are clear. [...] All critics agree that if Mr P\*\* had avoided personalities, and had instead contented himself with an attack on what threatens morality in the works of the encyclopédistes, [...] he would have produced a worthy piece.<sup>52</sup>

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48 Jean-Baptiste Rousseau, *Le Flatteur* (1696), Jean-Baptiste Gresset, *Le Méchant* (1747) and Néricault Destouches, *L'Ingrat* (1712). According to the author of a review in the *Journal encycopédique*, the plot of *Les Philosophes* is 'stolen from the *Méchant*' (1760, III, p. 129).

49 *L'Observateur littéraire*, 18 vols (Paris: Duchesne/Lambert, 1758–1761), III (1760), pp. 120–21 and 132.

50 *Journal*, II, p. 359.

51 The Count de Durazzo writes to Favart, for example, on 14 June 1760, that though *Les Philosophes* had appeared to him to be 'without invention or interest', it was nonetheless 'written with spirit, and in a good style' (Favart, *Mémoires et correspondance littéraires, dramatiques et anecdotiques de C. S. Favart*, 3 vols (Paris: Léopold Colin, 1808), I, p. 43). Similarly, Voltaire writes to Palissot on 4 June, 'I consider your play well written' (D8958).

52 *Mémoires*, I, pp. 29, 53 and 37.



Alongside the reference to 'ancient Greek comedy', especially Aristophanes, which was also found in many of the polemical texts, the play was also reproached for itself being nothing but a defamatory pamphlet. Collé hypothesised that Palissot in fact only wrote what he described explicitly as a 'pamphlet', 'intending to have it printed privately'.<sup>53</sup> In this debate, discussion essentially centred around the presence (universally recognised, even by Palissot's supporters) of personal attacks that directly targeted the philosophes. D'Acquin did not deny that 'Palissot, carried away, no doubt, by the fire of composition, or perhaps irritated by particular ideas, allowed certain details into his play that are too identifiable, and mean his characters become personalities'.<sup>54</sup> Fréron wrote, in a similar vein, that 'most spectators were shocked — and with reason — at the personalities that the author let himself portray, especially at the first performance'.<sup>55</sup> But both journalists added, too, that Palissot modified these 'personalities' at the second performance. Favart was in agreement, though showed his loyalties to the philosophes' camp when he suggested that 'to cut out [these attacks] entirely he would have had to cut the whole play'.<sup>56</sup>

It is important to understand what precisely is meant by this term 'personalities', and examine the exact nature of those that remain in the printed text. Fréron recognised that 'the scene of the bookseller is another one of those satires by the author of the Philosophes that could not be ignored': 'he names works, and to name works is to name their authors'.<sup>57</sup> But he also added, in Palissot's defence, that 'people use the term 'personalities' for portrayals that are nothing of the sort'. Reporting to Voltaire on the first performance of *Les Philosophes*, d'Alembert wrote on 6 May 1760: 'Neither of us is attacked personally; the only people mistreated in this way are Helvétius, Diderot, Rousseau, Duclos, Mme Geoffrin, and Mlle Clairon, who complained about this infamy'.<sup>58</sup> Reading the play, we find that though Clairon and Grimm are the target of isolated jibes,<sup>59</sup> Diderot is clearly Palissot's main target: the name of the character Dortidius is an anagram of his name, extended by the Latin suffix ('-ius') used by Molière to mock his pedants, whilst the name of the young female lead, Rosalie, is taken directly from *Le Fils naturel*. Diderot is also

53 *Journal*, II, p. 351.

54 *Le Censeur hebdomadaire*, II, p. 369.

55 *L'Année littéraire*, 1760, III, pp. 217–18.

56 *Mémoires*, I, p. 47.

57 *L'Année littéraire*, 1760, III, p. 221. The journalist is referring to III, vi.

58 D8894.

59 Clairon is implied by the reference to the supportive actors that the philosophes, on the point of being represented on stage, will have on their side (III, iv), whilst in III, vi, M. Prope mentions Grimm's pamphlet, *Le Petit Prophète de Boehmischbroda*.

easily recognisable, following Fréron's own criteria, in the direct references to his works (not just the play *Le Fils naturel* and its accompanying *Entretiens* (1757), but also the materialist *Les Pensées sur l'interprétation de la nature* (1754), the libertine *Les Bijoux indiscrets* (1748), *La Lettre sur les sourds et muets* (1751), which dealt with language, knowledge acquisition and aesthetics, and his second play, *Le Père de famille* (1758)).<sup>60</sup> Rousseau is identifiable for the same reason, in the reference to his prize-winning 1754 *Discours sur l'inégalité*, and he is also indirectly represented by the character of Crispin, who claims to be his disciple.<sup>61</sup> Duclos is present in the quotation from his *Considérations sur les mœurs* (1751), which is referenced in a note; Delafarge even suggests that he is personally represented by the character of Théophraste.<sup>62</sup> Though he is not necessarily directly identifiable in *Valère*, Helvétius is equally the target of numerous attacks, especially in the theft scene (II, i), which puts into action the theory of personal interest set out in *De l'esprit*.<sup>63</sup> It is difficult to agree with Collé in his discussion of 'the woman, who represents Helvétius',<sup>64</sup> not least because according to Hennin, 'the old Dumesnil', who played the role of Cydalise, 'managed to dress and make herself up exactly like Mme Geoffrin, which caused those who knew the woman to laugh a great deal'.<sup>65</sup> This apparent identification is nonetheless confused by Favart's claim that Palissot 'would not admit to having had the least intention of depicting Mme Geoffrin', but rather 'admitted, so I've heard, that he drew

60 Respectively in II, iii; III, iv; II, iii and (for the latter three) III, vi. Delafarge also argues that the character traits Dortidius is said to possess resemble Diderot himself, however this seems to be based on very little direct evidence (pp. 151–52), and Barling suggests the description is nothing like him (p. 75).

61 The mention of the *Discours* is found in III, vi; Crispin's presentation of a paradoxical philosopher appears in II, vi. Before the performance, rumours were already spreading that Rousseau himself was going to be attacked: Voltaire wrote to Mme d'Épinay on April 25 that 'Préville will play Rousseau, walking on four legs.' (D8874).

62 Charlos Duclos (1704–1772). See II, iii and Delafarge, pp. 157–58.

63 II, i. See Delafarge, pp. 158–60 on the possible identification between Helvétius and Valère: he claims that Palissot distinguishes the man (known for his generosity) from the author (exponent of the doctrine of self-interest).

64 *Journal*, II, p. 359.

65 Pierre Michel Hennin (1728–1807), diplomat and author: letter to his son of 17 May 1760, quoted in the *Correspondance générale* of Helvétius, 15 vols (Oxford: Voltaire Foundation, 1984–), II, p. 277, n. 3. A letter from the abbé Trublet to Formey, written between 28 May and 2 June (D8944) confirms that 'from the second performance [...] certain controversial areas were cut, including a line that made too obvious reference to Mme Geoffrin, a rich society woman, with close links to the philosophes and other writers.'

*the main features of Cydalise from the Countess de la Marck*<sup>66</sup> — who was, of course, his former patron.

The first editions of the text began circulating on 19 May. There were multiple different editions that year, with several slight variations. A key area of difference is in Act III, where early editions have no scene v, and in some cases include two scenes vi. T.J. Barling, in his 1975 edition (from which Ferret takes much of his information on textual variants), hypothesises that the scene v introduced from the 1777 edition of the play (included in our edition) was in fact a scene that had been cut by censors from the original version: certainly, its presentation of Doritidius/Diderot as rejoicing in the illness of an acquaintance ‘whose dissection I’d have carried out’ seems merely gratuitous in plot terms, and calculated purely to discredit the protagonist.<sup>67</sup> The total run of the play, comprising fourteen performances, was seen by 12,839 people, including individuals who might traditionally have stayed away from the theatre, such as the clergy.<sup>68</sup> *This well-attested success is perhaps less due to any intrinsic aesthetic qualities than to the aura of scandal that surrounded it, whatever the censors may have suppressed.*

## The Pamphlet Quarrel

*Further proof of this scandal is the scale of the controversy set off by the performance of what Barbier termed ‘a partisan play’,<sup>69</sup> testified by the production in just a few months of the twenty or so texts published in Ferret’s edition. In July 1760 Collé wrote: ‘The whole of Paris has, these past weeks, been occupied with nothing but the quarrel between the encyclopédistes and their enemies; we have seen nothing but pamphlets and printed insults.’<sup>70</sup> In May, Favart was already able to note that ‘these days, Paris is only concerned with literary quarrels. [...] I do not know if literature is gaining anything, but it is*

66 *Mémoires*, I, p. 7. According to English Showalter, it makes more sense to see Françoise de Graffigny (1695–1758; novelist and salon hostess) behind the character of Cydalise: see ‘Madame a fait un livre: Madame de Graffigny, Palissot et *Les Philosophes*’, in *Recherches sur Diderot et sur l’Encyclopédie*, 23 (1997), 109–25.

67 Barling, p. xxvii.

68 Henry Lancaster, *The Comédie-Française (1701–1774)* (Transactions of the American Philosophical Society, 1952), p. 797.

69 Edmond Barbier, *Journal historique et anecdotique du regne de Louis XV*, 4 vols (J. Renouard et cie, 1847–56), IV, p. 347.

70 *Journal*, II, p. 367.

*certain that the authors of the pamphlets and the printers of the periodical press are profiting*'.<sup>71</sup>

The quarrel texts — comedies, plays in verse, and pamphlets taking on a whole variety of forms, from letters and fictional confessions, to pastiches of biblical 'visions', and texts whose stylistic unity is based on the recurrence of a single monosyllable — ranged from those printed with full *privilège* (the permission to publish accorded by the crown) or performed on the public stage, to those published or circulated illegally. In between was a whole ambiguous set of works printed with 'tacit permission' or 'a sort of permission'. The responses of the philosophes' supporters to Palissot's play display a relatively unified set of satirical strategies that were already visible in the play itself. The writers take their places in a pre-existing camp, and each camp defines its opponents in relation to itself, the responses creating and perpetuating a 'myth' of Palissot to rival his own 'myth' of the self-interested, grasping philosophes. Repeated accusations act both as slogans to identify a writer's allegiance, amusing his allies through knowing references, and as rallying cries, inviting the support of the public for his cause.

In order to ridicule him effectively, Palissot's opponents have to read his work as if he were not himself writing satirically. They have to take his misrepresentation of their ideas seriously, as if he really did believe Rousseau wanted to walk on all fours and eat leaves. He is thus, across the texts, accused of stupidity, jealousy, plagiarism, poor taste, and immorality. The theme of self-interest in particular, so key to Palissot's attacks, is turned back on him, with several pamphlets implying that he had bought the applause of the audience; an implicit reference to the well-known support Fréron had given the play, both in person at the Comédie-Française and in his *Année littéraire*.<sup>72</sup> A further repeated attack — which, like the reference to Fréron, implied inside knowledge on the part of the pamphlets' audience — is the suggestion that the playwright 'prostituted his wife in Nancy and Paris'<sup>73</sup> an accusation that recalls Madame de Graffigny's mention in her private writing of 'more

<sup>71</sup> *Mémoires*, I, p. 29.

<sup>72</sup> There was truth in the accusation, since a decade later Fréron was to admit, 'It was I who made his little literary reputation; I who had the play *Les Philosophes* received [by the troupe]; I, I admit, who had it applauded.' Fréron to Jacob Vernes, 20 October 1771, cited in Jean Balcou, *Fréron contre les philosophes* (Geneva: Droz, 1973), p. 195.

<sup>73</sup> *Les Quand*, in Ferret, pp. 101–06.

stories about him than would be necessary to dishonour five or six men'.<sup>74</sup> These texts, written in the heat of the quarrel, are naturally ephemeral and occasional in character, and are marked, too, by dramatically varying literary quality.

The literary interest of these quarrel texts lies mostly in their (more or less effective) use of rhetoric, whose success is measured in terms of its action on the reader. It should be remembered, indeed, that these texts were aimed at a public that — as contemporary accounts testify — was easily bored. D'Acquin highlighted, for example, at the end of his review of Poinsinet's *Petit philosophe*, that 'the public is fed up with poetry, plays, pamphlets for and against'. Addressing the combatants in both camps, he proclaimed: 'you are already making them yawn, so just keep on if you want to make them fall asleep entirely'.<sup>75</sup> This point doubtless explains the inventiveness — or, at least, the formal diversity — of the most popular texts. The potential for the audience to lose interest explains, too, the importance of laughter, which acts powerfully both to ridicule one's enemies, and to create a bond between the members of a particular faction.

## Voltaire and Palissot

A particularly complex element of the *Philosophes* quarrel is the role of Voltaire. In the prefatory letter to the first edition (included below) — which had held up the publication of the play in a censorship battle, and was, according to Favart, 'more insulting than the text itself'<sup>76</sup> — Palissot explicitly stated that two philosophers were exempt from his criticism: Montesquieu, who had died in 1755, and Voltaire, 'that rare genius of whom I have only ever spoken with delight, who received me with such kindness in his home'.<sup>77</sup> Palissot sent this first edition to Voltaire himself, having visited the writer in Geneva five years earlier. In the ensuing correspondence, the older man attempted to persuade the author of *Les Philosophes* to publish a retraction, or at the very least an acknowledgement that the citations from the works he critiqued in his preface were at best out of context, and at worst incorrect.

<sup>74</sup> 11 June 1751, cited by Showalter in 'Madame a fait un livre'.

<sup>75</sup> *Le Censeur hebdomadaire*, 1760, III, p. 312.

<sup>76</sup> *Mémoires*, I, p. 47.

<sup>77</sup> See translation of the preface, below.

Palissot refused, and tried to apportion the blame elsewhere.<sup>78</sup> In July 1760, when the correspondence ended, Palissot published the letters, putting Voltaire in a delicate position: not only had Palissot singled him out for praise, but there was now printed evidence of Voltaire's reasonable responses, which could be viewed by the other philosophes as acceptance of such obsequious flattery.<sup>79</sup>

Though in his private correspondence Voltaire had nonetheless continued to stress his solidarity with Diderot and the others whom Palissot had attacked, the publication of the letters pushed him into more direct, public action. First, in July 1760, he allowed his play, *L'Écossaise*, to be performed at the Comédie-Française.<sup>80</sup> This piece had been circulating in printed form since May, claiming to be the translation of a piece by the brother of the English philosopher David Hume. A story of reunited long-lost families, its villain is a hack journalist named 'Fréron' — an even more thinly-veiled reference to Palissot's friend and supporter Fréron than Palissot's original Dortidius/Diderot creation. Voltaire's access to the public, royally-sanctioned stage of the Comédie-Française (where his bust would twice be crowned with laurels) marked him out among the philosophes, and the performance of the play constituted a very public pinning of his colours to the philosophes' mast.

His second riposte was in print. In September 1760 an anonymous *Recueil de facéties parisiennes* appeared. The volume, containing texts by Morellet, Elie de Beaumont and La Condamine, had been put together by Voltaire, who also contributed a number of his own texts whilst stringently denying any involvement in the enterprise on several occasions, as was his wont.<sup>81</sup> The *Receuil* was comprised predominantly of texts relating to the quarrel around Lefranc de Pompignan's admission to the Académie Française, and to the linked quarrel around *Les Philosophes*. Particularly relevant to the latter were an edited, footnoted version of the letters

78 See *Lettres et réponses de Monsieur Palissot et de Monsieur de Voltaire, avec quelques notes sur la dernière lettre de Monsieur Palissot, etc.*, ed. by Kelsey Rubin-Detlev, in *Recueil de facéties parisiennes*, OCV, 51a (Oxford: Voltaire Foundation, 2015), pp. 245–340.

79 See Voltaire's letter to d'Argental on 4 June, in which he states 'je dois craindre qu'on ne me reproche d'être complice de la comédie des *Philosophes*' (D8959).

80 *L'Écossaise*, in *Works*, 1760, OCV, 50 (Oxford: Voltaire Foundation, 1986). On the place of the play in the polemic, see Logan Connors, *Dramatic Battles in Eighteenth-century France: Philosophes, Anti-Philosophes and Polemical Theatre* (Oxford: SVEC, 2012), pp. 113–216.

81 *Receuil*, pp. xix–xxv.

between Palissot and Voltaire, and a re-publication of the very preface that had originally sparked the latter's irritation, with its own preface.<sup>82</sup> The preface to the preface repeats many of the critiques already familiar from the other quarrel texts: Voltaire questions Palissot's own literary abilities, and suggests he is motivated by greed and jealous self-interest rather than any high-minded morality. The footnotes systematically refute the claims made about the philosophes' own works. Particularly notable are a sequence that repeats, again and again, 'you lie',<sup>83</sup> and the several notes in which Voltaire takes up the question of definition and factional delimitation that we have already noted as key to the quarrel more broadly. Many of those Palissot attacks, he claims, are not the *encyclopédistes* with whom Voltaire identifies himself, and should not therefore be lumped together in one group.<sup>84</sup>

### Diderot's Reply?

Voltaire's *Recueil des facéties* referred explicitly to the occasional nature of the texts produced around *Les Philosophes*; including, perhaps, the play itself. They were, said Voltaire, trifles, destined to be forgotten, and published purely for the amusement of the contemporary reader.<sup>85</sup> However, *beyond the recurring attacks and defences, and the large helping of bad faith that necessarily shaped their creations, in this quarrel these authors also addressed bigger questions; in particular, that of the line between comedy and personal satire in the theatre. For modern readers, they raise further questions still; notably, the extent to which a Comédie-Française success can or should be reduced to a mere 'occasional' piece — and conversely, how far texts that tradition has set up as 'literary masterpieces' may in fact have an 'occasional' dimension.*

Key to the latter point is Diderot's *Neveu de Rameau*. This complex novel-satire-dialogue has presented an endless puzzle to both readers and critics since its posthumous publication in 1805.<sup>86</sup> At times, Diderot's

82 *Lettre du Sieur Palissot, auteur de la comédie des 'Philosophes', au public, pour servir de préface à la pièce*, ed. by Jessica Goodman, in *Recueil*, pp. 221–44.

83 *Lettre*, pp. 240–41.

84 *Lettre*, p. 229.

85 'Préface' to the *Facéties*, ed. by Diana Guiragossian-Carr, in *Recueil*, pp. 341–50.

86 The text was initially published in German translation by Goethe, then translated back into French and published in 1821 by de Saur and Saint-Geniès. The first



own core beliefs in the value of encyclopaedic knowledge and education are called into question, whilst despite the apparent adoption of position indicated by the presence of a character called 'Moi/Me' interrogating a third-person 'Lui/Him', neither of the two characters can be said consistently to ventriloquise the author's voice; each being privileged or criticised in turn. Two centuries of critics have attempted to 'solve' this puzzle, trying to integrate the apparently disparate aspects of the text's philosophy, but far from reaching a consensus, each new analysis has only added to the complexity by demonstrating the strength of evidence for each new theory.<sup>87</sup>

Yet the text's very first critic, Goethe, identified its main focus as a very simple one: namely, to ridicule the anti-philosophes who had made such mercilessly personal attacks on Diderot over the *Encyclopédie*; in particular, Palissot. In his 1805 German translation, the first edition of the work to be published, the explanatory notes for the reader include entries on Palissot and *Les Philosophes*, which Goethe had watched as a child.<sup>88</sup> Goethe devotes lengthy discussion to the position of Diderot's text in the quarrel we have thus far outlined. Diderot, Goethe wrote, 'uses all the powers of his mind to depict the flatterers and parasites in the full extent of their depravity, in no way sparing their patrons. At the same time the author is concerned to classify his literary enemies as precisely the same kind of hypocrites and flatterers'.<sup>89</sup>

Though to read *Le Neveu* as nothing but personal satire is severely reductive, it is nonetheless revealing to consider why Goethe was so convinced in this statement. The personal element of Diderot's text is easily discernable: Palissot's name appears twenty-three times in the text, as one of the group of parasites that fawn over a banker and his actress wife, with whom the eponymous Neveu (Lui/Him) is associated. These

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published version based on the French manuscript was the 1823 Brière edition. See *Rameau's Nephew / Le Neveu de Rameau. A Multi-Media Bilingual Edition*, ed. by Marian Hobson, trans. by Kate E. Tunstall and Caroline Warman, 2nd edition (Cambridge: Open Book Publishers, 2016), <http://www.doi.org/10.11647/OBP.0098>

87 See amongst others Jean Starobinski, 'Diogène dans Le Neveu de Rameau', *Stanford French Review*, 8.8 (1984), 147–65, and Donal O'Gorman, *Diderot the Satirist* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1971).

88 See James Schmidt, 'The Fool's Truth: Diderot, Goethe, and Hegel', *Journal of the History of Ideas*, 57.4 (1996), esp. 625–28.

89 Goethe's notes to his translation of *Rameaus Neffe*, in *Goethes Werke*, XXV, cited in translation by Schmidt in 'The Fool's Truth', p. 628.

are self-interested, mediocre men who live only from the exploitation of others, and who, significantly, are characterised as spending their lives in petty disputes, forming and breaking alliances, each with his own view of what is right or wrong. In a ranking of the most 'sublime' wrongdoers of the age, Palissot is placed a respectable second.<sup>90</sup>

To a certain degree Lui also directly represents both Palissot as an individual, and the whole anti-philosophes camp. Many of the accusations made of Palissot elsewhere in the quarrel pamphlets find parallels in Lui's character. Most strikingly, our lasting image of Lui is of his tears at the end of *Le Neveu* over the death of his 'dear other half', from whom he drew such lucrative profit. O'Gorman argues that this is a direct echo of the similar accusations made against Palissot in *Les Quand* (see above).<sup>91</sup> Lui is jealous of geniuses and scornful of all philosophers, he is driven purely by self-interest, and his special task is to flatter his mistress in private and to express unequivocal support in public, a feature that recalls the charges of Fréron's sycophantic public flattery of *Les Philosophes*. Moreover, Diderot incorporates not only the attacks but also the language of the pamphlets. Particularly notable is the animalistic vocabulary, first present in *Les Philosophes* with the mention of Dortidius and his companions as 'wolves',<sup>92</sup> and reprised both in *Les Quand*, which accuses Palissot of plotting with 'people of that species' and *Les Originaux*, which dismisses 'these species of men'<sup>93</sup>. In *Le Neveu de Rameau* the motif is extended: the parasites are repeatedly referred to as both 'species' and 'beasts'. Here, though, they are merely examples of a much deeper problem: 'In nature, all species prey on each other; in society, people of all stations prey on each other too. We're forever passing sentence on each other without the law being involved.'<sup>94</sup>

For a whole host of reasons, not least the complexity of the title character, a straightforward identification is flawed. The attacks made in Diderot's work are generalised and nuanced; moreover, it was not published in his lifetime, and there are no records of its ever having been read by a third party: it could therefore have no hope of either correcting Diderot's enemy or winning support for Diderot's position.

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90 *Rameau's Nephew*, p. 68.

91 O'Gorman, *Diderot the Satirist*, p. 40.

92 I, ii.

93 *Les Originaux*, in Ferret, pp. 226–45, I, vi.

94 *Rameau's Nephew*, p. 42.

The occasional nature of personal satire implies it needs to appear in the moment if it is to have any impact, and Diderot's words, found decades later, lose their sting and immediate significance when the subjects are long dead. With this in mind, it would also seem misguided to argue that Diderot in fact entered fully into the spirit of his contemporaries' tit-for-tat exchange, holding out to take posthumous revenge and become, in the final words of the text, 'he who laughs last'. Nonetheless, that the critic closest to the time of the quarrel, Goethe, was particularly sensitised to this element, recognising the text as holding a place in the factional tradition, reveals how clear these similarities must have been in the period, and even the lack of publication cannot negate this fact. And perhaps particularly significant here is Diderot's awareness of the mechanics of factional quarrelling, demonstrated by the naming of his characters *Moi* and *Lui*.<sup>95</sup> Just as Palissot defined his enemies 'les philosophes', creating himself as an 'anti-philosophe' in the process, so *Moi* and *Lui* can only be defined in relation to one another, the one creating the other by his very existence.

*In shedding light on Diderot's text, and most notably on the dimension of combat present within it, Les Philosophes and its surrounding pamphlets illustrate a conception of literature as analysed by Sartre: if 'a book has its most absolute truth in its own time', if 'it is an emanation of intersubjectivity, a living embodiment of the rage, the hatred or the love between those who produced it and those who receive it', then 'to write for one's time is not to reflect it passively. It is to wish to maintain or change it, and therefore to go beyond it, into the future; and it is this effort to change it that situates us most profoundly within it.'*<sup>96</sup>

## The Translation Project

Indeed, it is the occasional nature of this play, paradoxically, that motivates this translation project. Critics, both contemporary and modern, have frequently questioned the intrinsic literary and dramatic quality of the text itself, and these misgivings might suggest that a translation is at

95 Marian Hobson, 'Déictique, dialectique dans le *Neveu de Rameau*', in *Etudes sur Le Neveu de Rameau et Le Paradoxe sur le comédien, Cahiers Textuels*, 11 (1992), ed. by George Benrekassa, Marc Buffat and Pierre Chartier, p. 11, p. 16.

96 Originally published in the review *Die Umschau* in 1946; reproduced in *Le Monde*, 16–17 April 2000, p. 15.

best pointless, and at worst, the artificial perpetuation of a text that is barely remembered in its original language.<sup>97</sup> However, its function as the way into this wider literary quarrel changes things. This text, in a recognisable dramatic format, with a plot and characters that seem (all too) familiar to us, is not only the keystone of the *encyclopédistes'* quarrel, but also perhaps its most accessible component, and thus opens up the whole episode to a broader audience. Moreover, the online editions published by Open Book Publishers allow us to extend its accessibility further. This is, as we have argued, a text that is part of a much bigger whole; a text, furthermore, that is full of references to texts and people that an Anglophone, non-specialist audience is likely to find off-putting or opaque. The ability to jump quickly to further information makes it immediately more legible, whilst the addition of links to the various quarrel texts where available (in their original form) allows the more specialist reader to follow the network of textual production in all its multiplications and ramifications. On a similar note, a final motivation for adopting this format was the existence of a bilingual edition of *Le Neveu de Rameau* in this very same series, wonderfully translated by Caroline Warman and Kate Tunstall. The links between Palissot's text and the infinitely more complex production by Diderot can now be tracked by an Anglophone audience.

The translation was a collaborative project, undertaken across the course of second-year language classes at St Catherine's College, Oxford, in 2017–2018. Taking our cue from the multi-handed *Encyclopédie*, rather than the combative quarrel texts, we approached the project in a spirit of co-operation and mutual support. In the early stages, the six students and I sketched out the challenges of this group project (length, consistency, early modern French, verse), and set out a plan. The edition from which we worked was Olivier Ferret's 2002 edition, based on the 1760 edition. All textual variants from later editions recorded in his footnotes have been omitted in order to avoid debates over the sorts of variants that could and could not be translated: the aim is an accessible translation, rather than a fully worked scholarly edition.<sup>98</sup> The only exception is the extra scene v, discussed above, since that is substantial enough to produce a coherent translation.

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<sup>97</sup> See, for example, Delafarge, pp. 135–37.

<sup>98</sup> Ferret (pp. 82–85) also includes variants from the prompt's manuscript.

Our translation uses iambic pentameter, without rhyme, in place of the French Alexandrines. This decision was taken to preserve the somewhat clichéd feel of the original without forcing the English too much. The highly specific context of the play's production posed some challenges. Even as early as the 1782 edition, Palissot notes that the references in the bookseller scene (III, vi) have become unrecognizable for a contemporary audience: a translation across 250 years and into a different language necessarily increases this alienation several hundredfold. Our decision, then, was not to attempt a full cultural translation in which the references were as familiar to our readers as the original jibes were to the 1760 audience: such a translation would have been a wholly different text, and would have lost the key interest, for us, of this project; namely, its status as a way into the larger quarrel of which it forms a part. Instead, the translation maintains its specific setting and references, whilst extensive footnoting situates individuals and their works in the cultural landscape of mid-eighteenth-century Paris. We therefore retain the phrase 'philosophes', where possible, rather than translating it as 'philosophers', since the word had (and retains) a very specific charge in French. Similarly, characters and books referenced retain their French names and titles, and the odd use of 'Monsieur' or 'Madame', recalls to the reader the setting in a Parisian *salon*. The language used shifts between the formal and informal, reflecting the theme of role-playing: Marton, Crispin and the young lovers speak straightforwardly and pragmatically to one another, as — for the most part — do the so-called philosophes amongst themselves (reflecting their use of 'tu' in the original French); however, Cydalise takes on a more high-flown tone, as do the philosophes when they are trying to impress her.

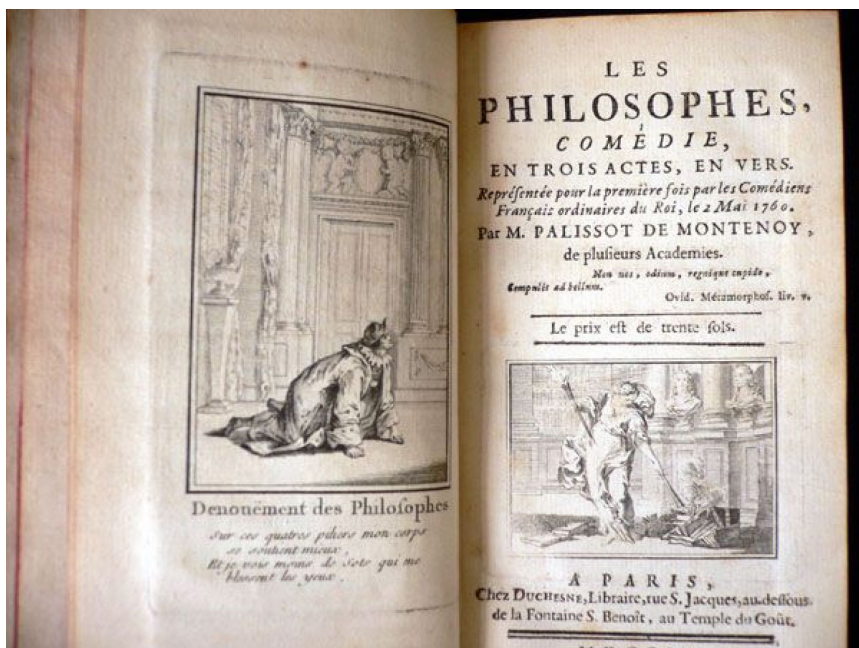
The method we followed, though basic, might be of use to others wishing to take on similar projects; especially at a moment (2020-21) when online collaborative work is more common and more necessary due to social distancing. We worked through the play chronologically. Individuals translated sections and saved them in a shared Google Drive folder. These sections were read and commented upon by the rest of the group, using the comment function to make suggestions or insert queries regarding vocabulary, rhythm, synonyms, lost sense, etc. In class time, varying pairs of students worked through these annotated

sections, responding to questions, looking for better alternatives, and adding further annotations where necessary. Undertaking this editing in class time allowed students to share particularly difficult issues, and allowed me to monitor discussion and model different approaches to translation challenges (moving between verb/noun/adjective forms of words; shifting comic or rhythmic elements elsewhere in a sentence; exploring different sentence breaks; finding culturally appropriate alternatives). This could be approximated online by having different breakout rooms open on a video chat programme whilst the students worked on the translation. Finally, we all individually read through the text as a whole, making further annotations, which we used to refine and finalize the translation.

We hope that the publication will serve as a useful tool for colleagues teaching the text within Oxford and beyond. But it can also serve as a model of how a student translation project can be combined with a tutor's research interests to produce an output that is useful for a broader audience; involving the student in the move from the traditional 'lone scholar' model towards the team-based sort of project that is becoming increasingly common in Humanities research. Colleagues elsewhere are bound to know of similar un-translated texts in their own fields, to which the same model could be applied. By definition, such texts are likely to be the less canonical, more 'marginal' texts: such a project then also offers the opportunity to engage students (both here, and studying literature in translation elsewhere) in more unusual literary output; opening up the curriculum beyond the traditional authors and genres.







Title pages of Charles Palissot de Montenoy, *Les philosophes*, comédie. Paris: Chez Duchesne, 1760. Edition-Originale.com, <https://www.edition-originale.com/fr/livres-anciens-1455-1820/editions-originales/palissot-de-montenoy-les-philosophes-comedie-ensemble-1760-27447>

# Letter by Mr Palissot, Author of the Comedy *The Philosophes*, to Serve as a Preface to the Play<sup>1</sup>

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*You whom Corneille, Racine and Molière always respected, and who should not have expected to see yourselves insulted in prefaces by a sect of new men who have provoked neither any respect nor any surprise: you who are free from self-interest, from prejudice, from hatred, and to whom I owe so much gratitude, allow me to put to you the views<sup>2</sup> that guided me in the preparation of the work that you have had the indulgence to applaud.*

*Certain people, humiliated by the encouragement with which you deigned to honour me, not daring to attack your support directly,<sup>3</sup> instead raised cries of libel and malice. I felt it necessary to justify myself against these reproaches, so alien to my sentiments and to my heart. I address my apologia to you. Read and judge.<sup>4</sup>*

An imperious sect, formed in the shadows of an enterprise which could have been the glory of our century,<sup>5</sup> exercised its rigorous despotism over science, literature, art and morality. Armed with the fire of philosophy, its members inflamed the minds of the people rather than shedding light therein: they attacked religion, laws and morals; they preached pyrrhonism<sup>6</sup> and independence, and at the same time as denouncing all authority, themselves imposed a universal tyranny. It was not enough for them pompously to publish their opinions; rather, they declared war on anyone who did not bow to their idols. The *Encyclopédie*, a work that should have been the glory of the nation, became its shame; but from its very ashes were born a number of converts who, purporting to be men of character, inspired in women ideas of anarchy and materialism.<sup>7</sup>

The most detestable maxims of Hobbes and Spinoza and the most republican ideas appeared everywhere in their writing and speech.

True philosophers, ministers of religion, true citizens; indeed, all honest men trembled at the audacious dogmas they put forward against divinity and supreme authority. Some complained that the might of the Church and the sword of the law struck only the weakest blows against them; but these were whispers rather than true complaints, for no-one dared raise their voice.

These new philosophers thought themselves the masters of renown: they handed out reputations and artistic accolades on a whim, but no-one had a chance of receiving their attentions unless they too were part of the sect. Indeed, this malady was so widespread, it had so effectively made its way into every area of life, that a whole part of the nation was caught up in it,<sup>8</sup> thinking only according to what these oracles prescribed.

The only means left to cut these powerful people down to size was to attack them with ridicule before the eyes of an assembled public: this was to return theatre to its original purpose,<sup>9</sup> and it might be said that it was a moderate response only to take up such arms against their excesses.

But for this task a soul was required that was sufficiently courageous; sufficiently inflamed (if I dare say it) by the love of public good, so as not to be afraid of either obstacles or dangers. I did not shy away from all that might be attempted to bring my name into disrepute; I foresaw the malicious use that would be made of the portraits contained in the play of individuals whose talent and morals I repect, though I might not adopt their philosophical systems.<sup>10</sup> Had I been capable of remaining under any illusions in this regard, I would have been disabused of them even before the first performance of *Les Philosophes*, when I saw discussed in public extracts from my play which only ever existed in the imagination of those who attributed them to me.<sup>11</sup>

When I saw it claimed in writing that I attacked that rare genius, of whom I have only ever spoken with delight,<sup>12</sup> who received me with such kindness in his home when I went to pay him my respects and admiration, and who has since often honoured me with letters that I shall keep safe for all my life.

When, moreover, I saw that I was being accused of not even having spared the illustrious Montesquieu, these so-called wise men flattering themselves by the implication that there was no immense gulf separating

them from these great men. Though these famous geniuses who have enlightened their century may at times have forgotten themselves through human weakness, this group of philosophers, who have only imitated them in their faults, have no right to make any sort of comparison with them.

What I would never have anticipated, however, is that people would affect to have forgotten all of the models that authorise my choice of subject and the manner in which I have treated it: that they would be unable to remember that Molière mocked in the theatre the Hôtel de Rambouillet,<sup>13</sup> Cotin, Ménage,<sup>14</sup> the court, the devout and doctors;<sup>15</sup> that even Racine put the magistrature on stage.<sup>16</sup>

Moreover, convinced that the truly philosophical action of a good citizen is to have the courage to pull his country out of dangerous errors, and to sacrifice everything to this glory, I could not be held back by any personal considerations; not even the fear of the pamphlets in which I knew I would be attacked, and to which I shall never respond. I must rely for my defence on all those who still believe in the respect of authority, in natural feeling, in ancient morals.<sup>17</sup> I will simply observe that the most hateful recriminations will never prove anything either against my play, or in favour of the false philosophers, but will on the contrary give me the satisfaction of seeing honest men join me in my scorn.

In response to the charges of malice made against me, I will simply employ these judicious and remarkable words of M. Diderot: 'I know that people speak thus of works in which authors have let loose all their indignation: *This is horrible! People must not be treated so harshly! These are terrible insults that should not be published,* and other similar claims that have been made across time about all those works in which idiocy and evil are painted in the strongest colours, and which we read today with the greatest pleasure. Let us explain this contradiction in our judgements. At the moment at which these formidable productions were published, *all villains were alarmed, and feared for themselves.* The more a man was full of vice, the more vociferously he complained. He objected to the satire based on the age, the rank, the dignity of the person attacked; on hundreds of *those little fleeting considerations, which lose their importance day by day, and which evaporate before a century has passed.* Passing circumstances are forgotten, posterity sees nothing but folly, ridicule, vice and evil, covered in ignominy, and rejoices in this as

*an act of justice...* It is only reprehensible weakness that prevents us from demonstrating towards baseness, envy, and duplicity, that strong and profound hatred *that all honest men should feel.*<sup>18</sup>

In the light of such decisively authoritative words, I would therefore be justified in making no apology: but there are some delicate and honest souls, whose errors deserve some indulgence, who are troubled by the word 'malice'; not always taking the time to consider whether its application is just. It is for their sake that I will add this question, which seems to me apt to calm them regarding any pleasure that they may have taken in my comedy.

Who is really evil: he who devotes himself to the defence of legitimate authority and of the most sacred bonds of society, or those men who,<sup>19</sup> impatiently struggling against all restraints, the enemies of all power, dare to publish what follows?

'Between animal and man there is no real *division*. Animals have a soul capable of all the mental operations carried out by man: conceiving and assembling ideas, and drawing from them a just consequence.' (*Interprétation de la Nature*, page 35.)<sup>20</sup>

'Our soul is made of the same ingredients and the same fabric as that of animals.' (*L'Homme plante*, page 31.)<sup>21</sup>

'It has been demonstrated by a thousand irrefutable proofs that there is only one life, and one happiness, and that the proud monarch dies completely, just like the modest subject and the loyal dog.' (*Discours sur la vie heureuse*, page 34 and 35.)<sup>22</sup>

'That which pleases the body is the sole route to happiness.' (*Discours sur la vie heureuse*, page 6.)<sup>23</sup>

'The pleasures of the senses can inspire in us all sorts of feelings and virtues.'<sup>24</sup>

'Physical sensibility and personal interest are the authors of all justice.'

'Probity is nothing but the habit of undertaking useful actions, and must necessarily be founded in personal interest.'<sup>25</sup>

'The idea of virtue is not by any means absolute, nor independent of circumstances.'

'Virtue and truth are beings that are only worthy inasmuch as they serve those who possess them.' (*Discours sur la vie heureuse*, page 106.)<sup>26</sup>

'Neither vice nor virtue, moral good nor evil, justice nor injustice exist in themselves: everything is arbitrary and constructed by the hand of man.' (*Discours sur la vie heureuse*, page 11.)<sup>27</sup>

'The inequality of conditions is a barbaric law: no natural subjection into which man is born with respect to *his father*, or to *his prince*, has ever been regarded as a bond that obliges him, without his own consent.' ('Discours préliminaire' of the *Dictionnaire encyclopédique*.)<sup>28</sup>

'A child is not born as the subject of any country or any government; when he reaches the age of reason he is free to choose the government under which he wishes to live, and to become part of the political body that pleases him the best.' (*Dictionnaire encyclopédique*, art. 'Government', vol. VII, page 789.)

'Nothing is capable of submitting man to any power on earth but his own consent.' (*ibid.*)<sup>29</sup>

'A tacit consent binds us to the laws of the government under which we enjoy the benefit of holding certain possessions, but if our obligation begins with those possessions, it ends with our enjoyment of them.' (*ibid.* page 791.)

'Governments can dissolve when the legislative and executive powers act with force beyond the authority that has been accorded to them.' (*ibid.*)<sup>30</sup>

'It is only thanks to the weak and ignorant state into which they are born that children find themselves naturally subject to their fathers and mothers.' (*ibid.* art. 'Child', vol. V, p. 652.)<sup>31</sup>

'A son owes his father no gratitude for having brought him into this world.' (*Les Mœurs*, page 59.)<sup>32</sup>

'Filial love is very susceptible to exemptions.' (*Les Mœurs*, page 459.)<sup>33</sup>

'The best way to free oneself from the inopportune nature of desires is to follow them.' (*Les Mœurs*, page 75.)<sup>34</sup>

'In order to be happy, it is necessary to stifle any remorse: useless in advance of a crime, it is no more useful once the crime has been carried out. Good philosophy would do itself a disservice if it were to occupy itself with such irritating reminiscences, or dwell on such old prejudices.' (*Discours sur la vie heureuse*, p. 63.)<sup>35</sup>

The fear of raising ire in my readers makes me lay down my pen, and prevents me from looking through the *Pensées philosophiques* and *L'Interprétation de la Nature*.<sup>36</sup>





# *The Philosophes*

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## Characters

Cydalise

Rosalie (Cydalise's daughter)

Damis (Rosalie's lover)

Valère, philosophe

Théophraste, philosophe

Dortidius, philosophe

Marton (servant)

Crispin (valet)

M. Propice (bookseller)

M. Carondas

*The play takes place in Paris, in Cydalise's house.*

## ACT I

## SCENE I

DAMIS, MARTON

DAMIS

No, I shall never recover from this shock  
A promised match thus rudely broken off!<sup>37</sup>

MARTON

All's changed, I say.

DAMIS

How so?

MARTON

You're but a guard.

Madame won't make a match with such as you.  
She seeks a husband cut from different cloth  
A man, in short, who is a philosophe.<sup>38</sup>

DAMIS

What can you mean, Marton?

MARTON

You seem surprised;

But out of sight, you drifted out of mind.  
In three short months, this house has been transformed:  
Three more, perhaps, and all will shift again.  
Once more in highest favour you will stand;  
'Til then, you have no claim. The verdict's in:  
Though you were sure that you would soon be wed,  
The prize goes to the philosophe instead.

DAMIS

Alas, that all should thus have changed so fast!

MARTON

Monsieur, all women fickle creatures are.<sup>39</sup>  
As seasons change, so Cydalise does too,  
Each fleeting fancy grips her heart anew.  
At times she's giddy, overcome with joy,  
Yet then she's solemn, sulking like a child;  
A scandalous seductress, fancy free,  
Then prudish, chaste, and virtuous as a nun.  
Her nights are spent at balls, then church by day,  
With scholars one moment, buffoons the next.<sup>40</sup>  
'Twas once her way. But now the time has come  
For finer morals, for a wiser tone.  
Madame her household has of late reformed.  
Now naught but reason governs all our acts.  
First banished from her home was vulgar jest:  
The usurer's delight, the common fare;  
Now dining here we barely raise a smile.  
Yet if we yawn, at least it is with wit.  
Instead of merry vaudevilles and verse,  
We must endure the music of the wise;  
Those long and arduous tunes our only joy.  
But our true strength, Monsieur, in reason lies.  
Though once we spoke of worldly politics,  
In metaphysics all is now subsumed.<sup>41</sup>

DAMIS

The image that you paint is strange indeed,  
But you're the artist, and I'll trust your brush  
To paint Madame. But what of Rosalie?

MARTON

Why she grows bored, just as we all do, Sir.

DAMIS

And has her heart surrendered to my foe?

MARTON

Her heart's still yours, for love has held it safe  
Against your rival, and his daring plans.  
Your fate, though, in a mother's hands doth lie;  
A woman so bewitched I see no hope.  
Please pardon me these words. I speak things plain.

DAMIS

She was my friend; I trust this has not changed...

MARTON

Great wit, Monsieur, is all that she admires.  
A malady unknown among the young  
But common at her age. But still, with time,  
Perhaps to wisdom she could be recalled  
If only there were someone who could fight  
And play upon such progress as she's made.  
Myself, I hoped, back when this all began;  
But now the ills to come are all too clear.  
Between us...

DAMIS

What?

MARTON

Madame has writ a book.

DAMIS

Good god!

MARTON

Anonymous; and now in press.

DAMIS

Some kind of pamphlet?

MARTON

No: a handsome tome.

DAMIS

I hope and pray she won't reveal her name.

But among those wits our Mistress holds so dear,

Is none so frank, so apt to speak the truth,

To spare her from the shame of her mistakes:

Enlighten her?

MARTON

They play her for a fool:

They strive as one to flatter her, you know;

Your rival most of all. He knows her tastes,

And more than just applaud her fancy words

Parades her wit before like-minded men,

Those practised flatterers and charlatans,

In raptures to be part of her salon,

To bring their errors into it, to vaunt

Their power over credulous *esprits*,

Whose hides must toughen against their taunts and jibes.

DAMIS

And they are, so you say, philosophers?

MARTON

Yes, though they give themselves much greater airs.

The city's full of them. To charm Madame,

To pull on every heartstring that she has,

They've taken on positions in her house.

When they advise, inspired by reason's light,

Whatever they pronounce, Madame delights.  
 Yet from among their number I suspect  
 The 'secretary', received by her as wise,  
 Is nothing but a schemer and a crook,  
 Deceiving her to carry out some plan.  
 But in the end, I will expose the truth.

DAMIS

What has he done for you to scorn him so?

MARTON

Else I'm mistaken, or it is your foe  
 Who's had him taken on to serve his ends.

DAMIS

What man is he?

MARTON

A rogue, who virtue feigns;  
 Yet native of Pézenas, so they say,  
 His pompous title: 'Monsieur Carondas'.  
 Known for his mind, or that is what he claims  
 His speech replete with Greek and scholar's terms;  
 Outlandish jargon, and at every turn,  
 He references great erudites of old.<sup>42</sup>

DAMIS, *laughing*.

Ha, ha, ha, ha.

MARTON

The portrait's true to life.

DAMIS

This Monsieur Carondas sounds like bad news.  
 But with your help and that of Crispin too...

MARTON

What? Crispin, here?

DAMIS

Indeed, ma'am, it is so.

And I intend to join the pair of you:

I hope that you will swear to serve me well.

MARTON

Leave it to me, I'll put Crispin to work.

DAMIS

I'll count on you.

MARTON

Oh Sir, I hope you do!

I'll wage a war against philosophy.

DAMIS

The greatest joys of life I'll owe to thee.

But... just one thing

MARTON

I know just what you'll say.

Hold fast, Monsieur, by ardour you're forewarned:

Your love arrives!



## SCENE II

ROSALIE, MARTON, DAMIS

DAMIS

After three months away  
Returning to you, full of love and hope  
To claim what was once promised, in deep faith,  
I find now that a foe, in jealous spite,  
Dares rob me of the only prize I crave.<sup>43</sup>  
That against me, with your mother he conspires.  
Ah me! At least console my hopeless heart.

ROSALIE

Think you my own to be more blithe than yours?  
I watch these drastic turns with dreadful pain;  
Like you I suffer, but I love you still.  
At least in this I may retain some hope.  
Who could oppose two souls, so intertwined?  
My mother loved you. Maybe at your sight,  
Some fondness may return to her cold heart.  
A heart over which I used to hold more power.  
Now you, Damis, must try to move this stone;  
That with the happy union I seek,  
My mother's love I'll also owe to you.

MARTON

Fine words, but mark, that plan will come to naught.

ROSALIE

Let me be wrong.

MARTON

Through hard combat alone  
Can Cydalise to good sense be returned.

DAMIS

Yet we might try, perhaps, our little scheme.

MARTON

Yes; sighs and tears, that's just the way to go!

Oh, how philosophy inures the heart.

ROSALIE

Why, that is a surprise! But if Maman

Has promised me forever to Valère;

If this grand plan is truly so advanced,

Why until now has it not been announced?

What yet could hold her back?

MARTON

I'd be most vexed.

She has not yet invited the notaire,

It's true; the witnesses are not yet come,

Indeed; a few formalities remain,

I grant you that; perhaps the day has not

Been quite established yet in certainty;

That I'll admit. But does she not embrace

How publicly he worships all your charms?

And are you not at all times drawn to his?

But no; I was quite wrong; it's naught, in truth.

ROSALIE

Mercy! Must you disturb me so Marton?

MARTON

'Twas just a dream.

DAMIS

Marton...

MARTON

Mere idle talk.

A childish tale.

DAMIS

Marton.

MARTON

A vision; false;

Absurd.

ROSALIE

But Marton...

MARTON

Feverish, frenzied, mad.

A great illusion.

ROSALIE

Yet in truth, Marton,

This cruel tomfoolery becomes you not.

MARTON

Ma'am, I was wrong.

ROSALIE, *making as if to leave.*

Don't follow!

DAMIS, *stopping her.*

Rosalie.

ROSALIE

No Sir, it's far too much.

DAMIS

Please stay, I pray.

MARTON

Ah! Now you've lost your temper? Just as well.  
But let us reason. Tell me, if you please,  
Was such deceit required? I know that doubt  
Can cause us to discount our dreaded fears.  
To shy from danger's natural enough,  
If only to avoid a tiresome weight.  
I'd be the first to hide from you the truth,  
To close my eyes to such a blinding light,  
If not for my concern, which makes me speak.  
Forgive me, but you lovers are quite mad,  
First calm, and then despairing without cause,  
A happy balance never to be found;  
When cool sangfroid's a better guide by far  
Than love, which is a blindfold on your eyes.

DAMIS

Now that is real philosophy, indeed!

MARTON

Live amongst wolves and you will learn to howl,  
Or so the proverb goes. And it is true.  
Philosophy's a plague upon this house.  
But let us put aside these solemn thoughts,

*(To Rosalie)*

Let's make our peace. With no bad blood from you?  
Can you promise me this?

ROSALIE

Of course, I swear

MARTON

I swear to have your interests at heart.  
You Sir, who unperturbed in mind and soul

Would spend your days with eyes set on Madame,  
Must now retreat, and promptly would be best.  
Beware that it's broad daylight in this house,  
We risk at every moment being caught,  
But Cydalise must see you first of all,  
Before you plan for other rendez-vous.

DAMIS

Wholeheartedly I'll follow your command.  
My happiness I shall entrust to you.  
My darling one, adieu, my Rosalie!

SCENE III

MARTON, ROSALIE

MARTON

Have strength! To languish will not help your cause.  
With firmness you may overcome your grief.<sup>44</sup>

ROSALIE

If you could feel my hatred for Valère!

MARTON

Damis has left, it's true. But you must speak  
To Cydalise as soon as time allows.  
For if you love him, her consent you'll need  
Or so I do suppose.

ROSALIE

Indeed.

MARTON

Young girls

Do naught, you know, without their parents' say,  
So go the rules. And so you have to voice  
Hate for the one, and for the other, love.

ROSALIE

Of course!

MARTON

And can your spirit thus stand firm?

ROSALIE

Without a doubt Marton.

MARTON, *cunningly*.

I hear her come.

ROSALIE, *scared*.

Ah! Marton...

MARTON

Well! That's not the best of starts.

Most promising...

ROSALIE

Why must you scare me so?

When it's required, my love will give me strength.

MARTON, *mimicking her*.

Your love! Oh yes, you'll both do very well...

I'll wager that, in such a flustered state,

A word let slip by chance...

ROSALIE

No, you will see.

MARTON

It's not love's place to save you from despair;

Love is too maladroit. Think of your hate;

That is the sentiment that must prevail,

Your hatred must take hold, direct your soul.

I do not know if love, which I revere,

Is truly of all passions the most dear;

It's really naught but weakness and self-doubt.

Whilst hatred stems from ardour, drive, and fire.

Where one destroys, the other animates,

And in a female heart more natural is.

You're yet to know this sentiment, it seems.

May you then taste it, only for today.

I love Crispin and for Valère I feel...

But it's a game no more, your mother's here.

ROSALIE

Will you support me?

MARTON

Yes.



## SCENE IV

CYDALISE, ROSALIE, MARTON

CYDALISE

Be gone, Marton.

Go, take my keys; lock Plato safe away.

His world of ideal forms has dulled my mind.

I sought l'*Encyclopédie*, it was gone.

That book shall leave my cabinet no more

(*To Rosalie*)

Please stay; I wish to speak with you alone.

(*To Marton*)

Leave us, Marton.

MARTON, *to Rosalie*.

Hold firm, and prove your worth.

CYDALISE

Do as I say.

SCENE V

CYDALISE, ROSALIE

CYDALISE

                  You are both fair and wise,  
My Rosalie, I've always held you dear.  
Now let's see if you merit such esteem.  
To vulgar sentiment I'll give no weight:  
To love so biased, shallow, à la mode  
That's born, they say, from blood shared 'twixt our veins,  
And yet, in truth, is nothing but sweet lies;  
Mere weakness...

ROSALIE

                  What's that? Mother Nature's voice,  
That sacred link, so touching and so pure,  
That early duty, that first, august bond?  
(I can't describe that which I feel so well,)  
Is all forgot? Does my poor mother's heart  
Today pour scorn on this most holy trait?  
Remember, pray, the love that once you felt;  
Which reasoning on too much has caused to fade.

CYDALISE

I fell, as many do, for those vain dreams;  
Led like our forebears by mere common sense.  
Though blind and credulous, I was content,  
Machine-like, following the common herd.  
Now I begin to feel, to think, to know.  
And if I love you now, 'tis as a *Being*.  
But you should know that any other soul  
Would have an even smaller claim than thine.

ROSALIE

You tear my heart to shreds. But please, Maman,  
Allow me at your knees to plead my case:  
Ask what is rightly mine, and kinder words.  
Why untie all the bonds which held us close,  
Of which my trembling and my tears stand proof?

CYDALISE, *slightly moved*.

Poor girl! ... to err for you is full of charms!  
I pity you. But follow reason's path.  
The fashion for such puerile love has passed.  
I see your claim to own a mother's heart  
But elevate it; if to you I'm dear,  
If I some rights over you can also claim  
It's not down to the chance that brought your birth.

ROSALIE

I cannot bear to hear these loathsome words  
An insult to us both, a horrid slur.  
Think you that I'd so easily forget?  
My very life, I owe it all to you.

CYDALISE

I took great care to guide your girlish mind  
And that, indeed, deserves your love and thanks;  
The worthy object of my dearest hopes.  
To teach you thought, that's all that I desire.  
Imagine how much joy in genius lies:  
In opening your eyes to reason's light;  
Dispelling all the fog that clouds your mind,  
And freeing it from judgment's evil yoke.  
That art of life known only to the wise,  
Of which I've now experienced the joys,

That day of reason, scattering its rays:  
My dear, my love wants you to know it too.  
Your marriage to dear Damis was agreed;  
My head and heart by minor gains were led:  
Questions of fortune, and a trial to end  
All pointed to your union, it seemed.  
This is indeed how most things come about;  
But now, today, I break those vulgar ties,  
Damis has good sense, honour, virtue too.  
The least the world requires, it must be said;  
Not all young men are destined for great heights.  
And some respect we owe him, it is true.  
For you, my child, I want another spouse:  
One much more fitting, worthy of your mind.  
Valère can please, he knows how to seduce,  
But more than love you, he will teach you too.  
So yes; he is the object of my choice.

ROSALIE

Have you forgot that Damis once did have  
The blessing of my father, and yourself?

CYDALISE

Your father! True, I hardly thought of him.  
Always the pleasant voice of power. Ha!  
The Earth's most narrow-minded soul to date.  
A talentless and impotent machine,  
A man of habit, mired in routine,  
Who seemed to think of nothing much at all,  
Apart from that which made up his estate,  
And hundreds other trivial things beside.  
A champion of antiquated thought,

His morals primitive; and he allied  
 The rank of his dark robes with bourgeois tone.  
 He never spoke without due solemn weight,  
 Preoccupied at all times with the law,  
 Yet out of court relapsing into sin;  
 Like Dandin,<sup>45</sup> keen to judge at every turn.  
 But now he's dead, let's let him rest in peace.

ROSALIE

Please, Maman!

CYDALISE

What! And would you take his part?

A father is, all said and done, a man,  
 I'm justified to speak about his faults.

ROSALIE

If that's what your philosophy will teach,  
 Why, then, I shall renounce it, here and now.  
 Enlightened, I would stand to lose so much,  
 I state the truth. Permit me, please, I beg,  
 To speak to you in favour of Damis;  
 Recall your former kindness, for your child.

CYDALISE.

No, Valère is the partner that I choose,  
 Tonight you shall become husband and wife;  
 A union that will enrich your life.  
 And as for your disdain for reason's light:  
 You must, as I have, rid yourself of scorn.  
 With time and reason, you will find a cure.  
 You're at an age where life is just begun;  
 Where all yet seems unclear; but read my book.

It teaches of the mind and of good sense;  
Of passions, laws and of good governance,  
Of virtue, morals, habits, etiquette;  
Of peoples civilised and wild in turn;  
The disorder that we see, order beneath,  
Of happiness, that's both ideal and true.  
Therein I show the theory of all things,  
The secret ties that link cause and effect;  
I've written just for you a thoughtful text,  
A chapter on 'Your duties, as they stand'.  
A treatise, in encyclopedic form  
That Valère swears shows genius and wit.  
You'll be delighted with so fine a spouse.  
One day you'll see how much I've done for you  
You'll thank me for it. Now, my dear, adieu,  
See that you do my bidding.

## SCENE VI

ROSALIE, MARTON

ROSALIE, *without seeing Marton.*

Oh, such pain!

Oh what to do? Ah me! It's you, Marton.

MARTON

Indeed, and I heard all. But she's quite mad!

What lunacy!

ROSALIE

I'll die.

MARTON

Oh, quite the jest.

You, die? You silly girl; that's out of style.

Even in novels it's no longer done.

ROSALIE

But then...

MARTON

Now calm your nerves, engage your mind.

Had you not, after all, foreseen this trial?

ROSALIE

That does not help my stricken, shaking state.

MARTON

Have you so little faith in all my plans?

ROSALIE

Oh Marton!

MARTON

Calm yourself, please, first of all.

If your desires are met, pray, tell me dear  
What will your anxious worrying have done?

ROSALIE

Well yes, if you succeed, but if you don't?

MARTON

You'll cry as much as you could wish, my love;  
And I'll cry with you, never say a word;  
But 'til that moment, why not raise a smile?  
In any case, a laugh is always good,  
And when plans go awry we need it more.  
Well that's my view, at least. Why, sorrow's vain,  
And trying too; my nature's quite opposed.  
I think we should not dwell on it at all,  
And when we seek out pity, we are wrong.  
So let us plan instead some happy ruse,  
Come, follow, see if wise philosophy  
However strong its merits, can this day  
Hold out against Marton, Crispin, and love.



## ACT II

### SCENE I

VALÈRE, M. CARONDAS

VALÈRE

Frontin!

M. CARONDAS

No good shall come of that damned name,  
I've told you so. What if, by some malchance  
Before Madame you should address me thus?  
Frontin! For a savant? I should think not.  
One lapse in your attention's all we need,  
And our philosophy is overturned.

VALÈRE

Of course.

M. CARONDAS

We must, at all costs, both abstain  
From our more usual tone, for — so you say —  
By nature's right all men most equal are,  
And I, though Frontin, am in fact your peer.

VALÈRE

Indeed, this is my sentiment, I swear.

M. CARONDAS

And I myself wholeheartedly concur.  
For I have always thought the law was wrong;  
And Cydalise in one great chapter proves,  
Convincingly, I think...

VALÈRE

You trust the view

Of someone who, essentially, is mad?  
Whose mind may be so effortlessly changed?  
Her words are just as empty as her head.

M. CARONDAS

Between us two, the book, it's truly bad?

VALÈRE

Useless.

M. CARONDAS

The style...

VALÈRE

It's boring beyond words.

M. CARONDAS

And yet you flatter her with highest praise!

VALÈRE

Of course.

M. CARONDAS

The public?

VALÈRE

We shall tell them how

To think, to speak, to judge and how to write

We'll settle this quite easily.

M. CARONDAS

Of course,

To tame and flatter them remains our aim.

VALÈRE

No, not at all, in fact just the reverse!

There is a much more certain way.

M. CARONDAS

How so?

VALÈRE

For instance, we must speak of them with sneers;<sup>46</sup>  
 A strategy adopted by the wise,  
 It's most effective, you can be assured.  
 You'll see so soon yourself, and marvel too.  
 For we shall make that woman's name renowned;  
 Some bold, revolting, scandalous remarks  
 Will have the most extraordinary effect  
 When added to her book.

M. CARONDAS

A novel trick!

But how to make her think it's all her work?

VALÈRE

Is any of it hers? At first she will  
 Deny it all, then think the author's her.

M. CARONDAS

Oh my, I say! I'd simply die of shame!

VALÈRE

Do you forget she's of the female sex?  
 Believe me, cruder things we could have done,  
 Her pride's a trait on which we may rely:  
 In this, all women stubborn creatures are.

M. CARONDAS

Society wits have nothing on them, true.  
 But do you think that with such little change,  
 We can expect the easiest success?

VALÈRE

Of course! And this idea is nothing new.  
The book of Crates<sup>47</sup> gives us proof enough.  
Never has one man's work risen so far:  
For all spoke ill of it; still do today.  
It's known worldwide as the most dangerous book  
And yet we know Crates as a good man.

M. CARONDAS

It's true.

VALÈRE

Our Cydalise will have more fame  
The fairer sex is judged with less disdain,  
Additions made in secret by our hands  
Will shock her audience, cause great delight.  
Crates himself will envy how she's known  
And nothing's simpler, with us on her side.

M. CARONDAS

Well, brought up in your school Sir, though I am,  
I had naively taken at its face  
Both book and author. Yet it seems she wrote,  
Naught but your own words, Sir.

VALÈRE

The wretched fool!

M. CARONDAS

As for those phrases added to her book,  
What if the law should come for us, Monsieur?

VALÈRE

She'll hear her praises loudly sung abroad;  
No matter then if she retracts it all.

Besides, a love of truth can courage breed.  
 Impressive words, like *error*, *zest* and *zeal*,  
 And *persecution*, to her aid will come.<sup>48</sup>  
 This ancient strategy always works well.  
 As guide in this, have we not Socrates:  
 Oppressed, condemned by his ungrateful land?<sup>49</sup>  
 All our admirers would speak with one voice.

M. CARONDAS

Sir, Socrates himself obeyed the laws.

VALÈRE

Philosophy, then in its infancy.  
 Maintained a mask of prejudice, you know.  
 The time for this is past.

CARONDAS

All's then allowed?

VALÈRE

Except against us and against our friends.

CARONDAS

Praise be to wit and to philosophy!  
 For in this life there's nothing more sublime.

VALÈRE<sup>50</sup>

What, virtue on a rocky hill did lie?  
 The hardy only reached it. Man was lost.  
 This king of beasts wandered without a guide  
 Across the oceans, moving with the winds.  
 But now we know what truly drives mankind.  
 His motivation's happiness alone.  
 In living out his passions he's fulfilled.  
 Take them away, and he would soon be left,

To languish aimlessly upon the earth.<sup>51</sup>  
This unseen power, man's sole driving force  
From our philosophy's no longer hid.  
Morality to genius must submit.  
And on this Earth we humans rule supreme,  
Our private interest at the root of all;  
For it alone determines how we act;  
Our light and guide in all we say and do.  
Thus free from wrong; but bent to interest's voice  
The savage follows it deep in the woods,  
To its dominion cultured man does bow;  
It governs with one word all things that breathe.

M. CARONDAS

What? We must follow interest alone?

VALÈRE

Why, it is vital, nature tells us so.

M. CARONDAS

It pained me much to fool dear Cydalise;  
But now I see that such a thing's allowed.

VALÈRE

When fortune calls; why, take it at its word.

M. CARONDAS

Yes.

VALÈRE

Frankness is the virtue of a fool.

M. CARONDAS, *preparing to steal from him.*

Yes Sir... but then, I do still have my doubts;  
They hold me back.

VALÈRE

Why think such baseless thoughts?  
From prejudice be free!

M. CARONDAS

Speak you the truth?

VALÈRE

You must find happiness, no matter how.

M. CARONDAS

You mean that?

VALÈRE

Yes, in wooing Cydalise,  
You do a duty authorised by mores.  
Should one not fawn when pleasing company?  
To help oneself is nothing but good sense.  
'Our land is full of men who are but fools.'  
One sailor's words to Macedonian kings  
Are full of truth.

M. CARONDAS, *fumbling in Valère's pocket.*

Indeed.

VALÈRE

All property  
Ought to be public; but the means exist  
To overturn our fate. We can through skill  
Attempt to change our stars. It's simply weak  
To moan and languish, stopped by ancient qualms.  
(*noticing Carondas trying to steal from him*)  
What are you doing there?

M. CARONDAS

Self-interest...

This hidden law... Sir... that inspires us all,  
And governs every man that ever lived...

VALÈRE

What! Traitor, steal from me?

M. CARONDAS

No. It's my right...

All goods are common.

VALÈRE

Fine, but have more skill!

For there are risks to which we are exposed,  
When taken by surprise.

M. CARONDAS

Sir, I'll take care.

VALÈRE

From this, good Monsieur Frontin, you should learn;  
But since that name is no longer allowed,  
You now shall help me out with Cydalise.  
For now, all's well; to Rose I am betrothed.  
You know too well my thoughts on this affair.  
So please, proceed to flatter where you can.  
Your wise scholastic terms have wonders wrought;  
Continue, pray, to fill her head with words;  
With all that jargon which has worked before.  
You have no fortune, and yet here you might  
Begin to change your destiny; I'll help,  
If this procures the end I so desire.  
Adieu, please be discreet, and I'll be fair.



## SCENE II

M. CARONDAS, *alone*.

My first attempt was not the best, it's true.

To match my model, I have far to go,

For now, I'm destined for the second rate.

SCENE III

CYDALISE, M. CARONDAS

CYDALISE, *without seeing M. Carondas.*

At long last of those idlers I am rid.

How sloth is dull when one desires to think!

From all those bores with whom I was obsessed,

I never heard the germ of an idea.

Such insult to good sense cannot be borne;

But tiresome family, tolerate we must.

(*To M. Carondas*)

Ah, good! you're here! Now please, Sir, take your place.

With just a little work on the preface,

My book will soon be done. But I had hoped

That Valère might be here.

M. CARONDAS

He's leaving now;

Of you, Madame, we talked with so much joy.

CYDALISE

Did you speak of my book?

M. CARONDAS

He cannot stop.

He says its immortality is sure;

You will surpass the greats of every age.

My judgement I cannot compare with his;

But oh! my wonder heightens with each page.

CYDALISE

It pleases you?

M. CARONDAS

My mind is all confused.

Your book with such deep knowledge is replete;  
Your word on Socrates' demon I would trust.<sup>52</sup>

CYDALISE

You know it well.

M. CARONDAS

Yes Ma'am, that's what they say.

But tell me then, how did this come about?

You must know everything which has been writ.

CYDALISE

With many learned people I have met,

It's pure and simple chance.

M. CARDONAS

You were inspired.

But what! Have you not read the great Vossius?<sup>53</sup>

CYDALISE

Never.

M. CARONDAS

Casaubon?<sup>54</sup>

CYDALISE

Even less.

M. CARONDAS

Grotius?<sup>55</sup>

CYDALISE

Not once. So are these books by women writ?

M. CARONDAS

Good god, Madame, you shock me more and more,

You really know nothing of this?

CYDALISE

It's true.

M. CARONDAS

But of the law you speak so mighty well.  
And surely Tribonien<sup>56</sup> you must...

CYDALISE

I don't.

M. CARONDAS

At least you know Thales? Democritus?<sup>57</sup>

CYDALISE

No.

M. CARONDAS

*Le Fils naturel?*<sup>58</sup>

CYDALISE

Yes, that I know.

These are the works we must above all quote.

M. CARONDAS

On this point I can't claim authority,  
But, like you, I did judge it by its name.

CYDALISE

I earnestly agree. In one small trait  
The greatness of a work is plain to see.  
By a *je ne sais quoi*... one's soul is seized  
A feeling... genius draws us by its skill.

M. CARONDAS

I see. It's like steam rising from a stew  
Which rouses both the sense of smell and taste.

CYDALISE

Well yes, but that analogy is crude.

M. CARONDAS

It's from Lycophron.<sup>59</sup>

CYDALISE

Ah! That changes things.

Let's talk of my preface. I shall dictate.

*(After a long silence, emphatically.)*

Write this: *I lived*.<sup>60</sup> No, that's no way to start.

Erase, *I lived*. Please put yourself at ease.

*(Tartly.)*

Oh! Monsieur Carondas your pen is poor.

*(Pensive.)*

*I lived* means nothing.

M. CARONDAS

I'd be satisfied.

*I lived* means much!

CYDALISE

No, Monsieur, I desire

A philosophical and striking start.

M. CARONDAS

But such simplicity is good, Madame.

CYDALISE, *dreaming*.

No, no, I want a phrase that has more weight.

*(With humour.)*

Such ghastly paper I have never seen!

Erase that, Sir; your ink is truly foul.

*(Pensive.)*

Alas, I cannot find a better phrase!

*(Impatiently.)*

And after all, Valère ought to be here.

When I'm with him I'm so inspired with wit.

*(Pensive.)*

What! Not even a thought? Oh! woe is me.

M. CARONDAS

Why, inspiration comes and goes, you see?

This calls to mind the words of wise Souidas,<sup>61</sup>

Who said with style...

CYDALISE

My! Monsieur Cardonas,

Forget the dead. I had the perfect phrase

*(She thinks.)*

But it escapes my mind. Wait... yes, this time...

*(Impatiently.)*

Write this! But no, that phrase is too obscure.

I never felt such intellectual drought,

I've had enough, I give up on this task!

The publisher awaits, give him my work.

Wait no, come back. At last I've found the words!

Write this: 'Young man, take up this book and read.'<sup>62</sup>

*Young man, take this and read.* Is that not fine?

Tell me your thoughts, Monsieur...

M. CARONDAS

Grand and sublime!

It has an air of true intelligence.

CYDALISE

In reading it, my woes are all forgot.

*Young man, take this and read.* It is unmatched,

Valère, therefore, will find it most august.

M. CARONDAS

You seem to tremble, shaken by your phrase.

*Young man, take this and read.* There speaks a sage;

Nature will thus reveal its beauteous face.

Why, nothing's so sublime, yet modest too.

CYDALISE

But what does Marton want?

SCENE IV

MARTON, CYDALISE, M. CARONDAS

MARTON

Ma'am it's Damis;

He wants to speak with you.

CYDALISE

At such a time!

Without his interruption I'd be done!

That tiresome man won't leave me to my work.

MARTON

Valère will see it's done.

M. CARONDAS

What say you 'done'?

The book is writ, Madame, it is complete.

And ten years hence it still shall be revered.

CYDALISE

You're right. Make twenty copies of it, go.

I breathe at last! The work was worth the pain.

*Young man, take this and read!* Damis, come in.



## SCENE V

DAMIS, CYDALISE

CYDALISE

You're back again?

DAMIS

Why yes, Madame, I am.

To seek compassion and expose my soul.

I see too clearly, with no little pain,

That I have lost my dear place in your heart,

Our friendship, once so close, seems sorely changed.

But in my mind our souls are allied still.

Allow me to recall to you a hope

That time should not have cast out from your mind.

Your daughter, as you know, to me is dear:

To you and to her father this was clear.

Today your blessing I shall seek once more,

For all I need from you is your consent.

CYDALISE

Your memory, I admit, is quite correct;

And I was wrong to hint that my esteem;

The friendship that once bound me tight to you,

Should no longer be sentiments I trust,

Indeed, I should have said this from the start:

But I was most deceived by wit and charm,

And privileged too long the foolish wrongs

Of my beloved world... By age I'm changed.

The day has come to choose philosophy,

To free myself from judgement's heavy yoke,

At last existing only for the truth.

I've formed a learned company of men,  
In number few, but wise: they share my life.  
I learn to think through studying their books:<sup>63</sup>  
I've chosen one of these to be my son,  
And on this eve my hopes will be fulfilled.  
It's up to you to judge if, though your friend,  
I thus should sacrifice to you my joy.

DAMIS

Madame, I would do anything for you,  
Your friendship will inspire me ever more.  
But what could be the benefits, pray tell,  
Of spending time with all these learned men?  
I certainly can't see as 'wise' these frauds;  
These charlatans, performing for the crowd,  
And showing off so-called philosophy:  
My sense won't let me trust these boastful men.  
Such spectacle may lure the common herd.  
But I am not so easily drawn in:  
More apt to ask who's truly wisdom's friend,  
And who instead a pedant, peddling rot.<sup>64</sup>

CYDALISE

To pedants I'll admit we owe contempt,  
And I distinguish them from sages true.  
Please spare me, dear Monsieur, your bitter scorn,  
For those I name, Théophraste and Valère,  
Dortidius, they are all widely known...

DAMIS

Of them I know only Dortidius.  
So he's among them?

CYDALISE

Why such great surprise?

DAMIS

I knew him; please excuse my being frank:  
It seems back then he hid his game quite well:  
A fool he was; he near admitted so.  
When we were introduced, despite his smirk,  
The dull and hackneyed compliments he spoke,  
The sickly sweetness of his honeyed words,  
I never found him witty, great or wise.  
Despite his tone, and his affected air,  
I couldn't find him worthy of respect.  
In short, I saw him merely as a man  
Whose cold enthusiasm drew in fools.

CYDALISE

Such prejudice insults your common sense,  
For Dortidius brings honour to our land.  
By learned men he's always been esteemed,  
I cannot grasp why men speak ill of him.  
But let us leave this matter. Speak instead,  
Of what I gain by living with the wise:  
Of this, I was to tell you, was I not?  
And then, perhaps, you'll censure them again.  
No matter; at least see them as they are.  
Once prejudice destroyed my very soul;  
In vain my reason struggled to be free,  
And habit soon returned me to my ways.  
The most delusive terrors drove me mad:  
Fearing thunder; swearing ghosts were real.  
Admitting these absurdities, I blush,

But we are raised on just such futile fears,  
And thus they are impressed upon our minds.  
The trifling, useless schooling we receive,  
Instead of shining light on right and wrong;  
It teaches naught but how to hide our faults.  
My eyes were opened, though perhaps too late!  
Through these most blessed men I am reborn.  
Once chance alone determined whom I loved:  
My relatives were those I most adored,  
According to their closeness to myself.  
The same scheme to my learning I applied;  
I had all this — and so much more — quite wrong.  
But since my soul has found a different road,  
Philosophy has purified my mind  
Which now can see the whole world as my kin;  
Thus moved by sensibility alone,  
Humanity is now my only care.

DAMIS

Though this may cause displeasure, to my ear  
This word 'humanity' is without weight,  
And by so many rogues I hear it said  
I'd wager they'd agreed to spread its fame.<sup>65</sup>  
They want to make it something of a trend.  
A worthy and convenient veil, it seems,  
To mask the dullness of their point of view.  
And lend some beauty to their dreary tones.  
Among the men who preach it without end  
Are few who have compassion for the poor,  
Who show themselves, in times of need, to be  
More generous, or humane, or sincere,  
To put aside their own profane desires,

To overlook the errors of their kin,  
To praise the worthy, to, in short, seek out  
The way to be a better citizen;  
In faith, to tell the truth, I'd like to swear,  
They love the human race, but hate all men.

CYDALISE

You hold against humanity some deep grudge.

DAMIS

The word is much abused; I hate the sound.  
It is a sentiment too large for man,  
I've even seen, in contrast too extreme,  
That those who vaunt the notion most of all,  
Abandon their own child, yet love the world.<sup>66</sup>

CYDALISE

We must, Monsieur, have pity on the wise,  
For you're an enemy that they should fear.  
Our time and our great land have praised in vain,  
'Twas better to be deaf to all their words,  
And serve to amplify such envious thoughts.

DAMIS

What good has this philosophy produced?  
I really cannot fathom its success.  
I see around me self-important fools,  
Who take on airs by joining with a sect,  
And think thus to have raised themselves in worth.  
Establishing a court and devotees,  
They claim they save the poor, unfortunate arts,  
Quite unaware of all of satire's stings.  
Of mocking laughter, these men take no heed,

Though it may ring about them as they go;  
Admiring, praising, loving all abroad,  
And all the while degrading their own land,<sup>67</sup>  
Is this the great success that we must praise?

CYDALISE

Your reasons I admire, they have some weight;  
You cite me choice examples which I'll grant  
Are apt to press your cause. But never has  
An insult such as this proved any truth.  
Think you mere trifles would affect my view?

DAMIS

Madame, I see these horrors more and more.  
Mark me, through them our morals will decline,  
And I'm appalled by all these philosophes.

CYDALISE

Well then, think what you will, my good Monsieur.  
For you it's clear there's no cure to be had.  
Refusing absolutely to be swayed,  
Too credulous for reason to win out.

DAMIS

You think you've said it all, with that one word.  
That 'credulous' is equal to 'a fool':  
To many men it seems that's all too clear:  
But I'm less certain of this strident view,  
Which neither can persuade me, nor strike fear,  
My own view I hold firm; if they're displeased,  
My censure's aimed at them. I know my mind,  
Believing what I must, I state it proud.<sup>68</sup>  
These men may laugh, it makes no odds to me:

Why, let them find enjoyment where they will.  
 But I in turn will see them as mere fools,  
 Quite stupid in their incredulity.<sup>69</sup>

CYDALISE

I praise these words, pronounced in such good sense,  
 And shan't deny your right to have your say.  
 But without straying further from the point,  
 I know how much I owe to those great men,  
 Enlightened, whom you deign to persecute.

DAMIS

You owe to them the teaching of great truths?  
 That I cannot believe. They may destroy,  
 But nurture no, and certainly not teach.  
 What fruits expect you from their arguments?  
 Only too well I see how they will harm:  
 You'll follow in their path of sophistry,  
 Be blinded in the night of Pyrrhic fate.  
 Renounce your ties to those who do disrupt,  
 It's they who persecute, instead of I.  
 Reject these thoughts, unfitting as they are.  
 And rediscover, Ma'am, your former self.

CYDALISE

Have you now ended, Sir, your long tirade?  
 Your reasoning has strength, and much good sense.  
 I see your merit shines in brilliance;  
 It changes naught, you shall not have my girl.  
 Goodbye, Monsieur.

*(She leaves.)*

DAMIS

Oh God! What shall I do?

SCENE VI

CRISPIN, DAMIS

CRISPIN

Did you good progress make in your attack?  
The marriage is back on? For Cydalise...

DAMIS

It's she to whom I spoke just now, in vain!  
I must renounce my dreams of Rosalie.

CRISPIN

But why?

DAMIS

I am dismissed.

CRISPIN

Once and for all?

DAMIS

Once and for all.

CRISPIN

How so? We try so hard  
To please, yet she elects Valère instead?  
And nothing to be done?

DAMIS

I cannot think.

CRISPIN

Please, have no fear, I see another way.  
All we must do is kidnap Rosalie.  
The quickest way.



DAMIS

What folly do you voice?  
You count on her consent? You know her well,  
Thus speak you to me so?

CRISPIN

A mere idea.  
But since you have rejected it, we'll choose  
A far more certain path. I'll find Valère  
And speak to him with such a furious force,  
That he will surely flee their house tonight.

DAMIS

That seems to me a better plan indeed,  
But Cydalise?

CRISPIN

Yes?

DAMIS

She will be outraged.  
There's no more certain way to raise her ire,  
And have me sent away for ever more.

CRISPIN

Well then it's down to my audacious plan,  
Through which I shall enlighten Cydalise,  
And chase these false indulgers from her house.  
Then finally some credit I'll be due,  
And if Marton should lend her help besides,  
To reason you will see Madame submit.

DAMIS, *initially with joy.*

Ah! Crispin... yet, I'm loathe to fully trust...

CRISPIN, *emphatically*.

I want her torn between Valère and me.

You don't yet know the reaches of my powers;

My model is Democrites' Strabo.<sup>70</sup>

DAMIS

You?

CRISPIN

Yes, for I've played many, varied roles:

A wise man once employed me as his scribe;<sup>71</sup>

I could have made the royal authors' list;<sup>72</sup>

At least, that's what he told me, full of praise.

DAMIS

It's so?

CRISPIN

Already I had many fans;

But oh! he did me wrong when off he fled,

Eschewing honours, living in the woods.

It's true he knew not artifice nor plots.

It was philosophy that filled his head,

With righteousness and stubborn innocence.

A cynical and misanthropic beast,

He truly was a mad and singular fool.

DAMIS

How can I listen when I'm in such pain?

## SCENE VII

MARTON, DAMIS, CRISPIN

MARTON

Good Sir, we must cast light upon your woes;  
Come on, some joy!

DAMIS

And what do you suggest?

MARTON

Well, let's begin by laughing at your plight.

CRISPIN

Oh yes, let's laugh.

DAMIS

I'm in such deep despair.

MARTON

Then think not on it; banish your black thoughts.

CRISPIN

I think the woman must have lost her mind.

MARTON

And smile.

DAMIS

Marton...

MARTON

Console yourself, I said.

DAMIS

Whatever can this mean?

MARTON

You'll soon find out.

Yes, you're amongst the luckiest of swains.

## ACT III

## SCENE I

DAMIS, MARTON, CRISPIN

DAMIS

No, I cannot recover from this shock!  
Thus it is that they swindle Cydalise?

MARTON

But reason will, I hope, soon win the day.

DAMIS

I doubt it not, this note is far too good!  
To what, then, do we owe this lucky find?

MARTON

The simple chance, Sir, of this open door!  
For many hours I spied upon his steps;  
I always said that he was one of them.  
I would have sworn it.

CRISPIN

Frontin is his name:

And by it I'd have recognised the man.

MARTON

But who will see this note finds its true home?

DAMIS

You shall.

MARTON

But no, she'd hate me ever more.  
I'd never dare.

DAMIS

Marton...

MARTON

A note like this

To give it to Madame! Ah! no, I can't,

It would cost me too much.

DAMIS

But...

MARTON

It's no use;

I shan't do it.

DAMIS

Nor me.

CRISPIN

And nor will I.

MARTON

But in their presence it must be returned,

Or it will make no odds.

DAMIS

That's true.

CRISPIN

Silence.

Has she yet seen my face?

MARTON

No, she has not.

CRISPIN

And no one knows my name in all the house?

MARTON

No.

CRISPIN

I'll present myself and draw them in.  
Give me the note, I'll handle this affair.  
Go forth, Sir, I'll be sure to serve you well.

MARTON

I have the utmost faith in his success.

CRISPIN

And in return I only want Marton.  
For such a prize, what won't I dare to do?

MARTON

Be gone, you two, the company's on its way.

DAMIS

By you I trust my hopes will be fulfilled.

MARTON

Be gone, I said! Don't let them see us here!

SCENE II

MARTON, *curtseying to the philosophers.*

I shall announce you, sirs, to Cydalise.



## SCENE III

THÉOPHRASTE, VALÈRE, DORTIDIUS

THÉOPHRASTE, *to Valère.*

So, Valère, have the marriage plans been made?

VALÈRE

Tonight's the night. The notary's on his way.

DORTIDIUS

What splendid news!

THÉOPHRASTE

I wish you all the best!

DORTIDIUS

It's all down to your merit and your skill.

THÉOPHRASTE

Despite the rage of those who envy you.

DORTIDIUS

And yet, you really could have hoped for more.

VALÈRE

I say!

DORTIDIUS

But yes! It's no false flattery.

VALÈRE

You mean...

DORTIDIUS

We know the value of your mind.

VALÈRE

Ah! You confuse me with your compliments.

DORTIDIUS

But yet it's true.

VALÈRE

If I had all your gifts,  
If such almighty qualities I claimed,  
Perhaps then I'd be worthy of this praise.

THÉOPHRASTE

Now does the bride-to-be agree to wed?

VALÈRE

Reluctantly, but oh! why should I mind?

THÉOPHRASTE

Of course, with time you'll make her see good sense.

DORTIDIUS

Good god, that girl is very hard to please!

VALÈRE

I know not who at present holds her heart;  
But Cydalise could not be more content.

DORTIDIUS, *laughing*.

I never saw a greater fool than her.

VALÈRE

I cannot wait to wed, and quit this house.  
I should have died had this not ended soon,  
We've worked so hard to see our goal achieved.

DORTIDIUS

And once the knot is tied, I swear I'm done!

THÉOPHRASTE

I quite agree, I've more than had enough!

(*To Valère*)

But you, at least, with passion as your guide,  
Could suffer boredom, driven by your love...

VALÈRE, *laughing*.

Ah, love! Yes, it was that which spurred me on!

DORTIDIUS

He'll marry now into ten thousand crowns.

VALÈRE, *to Théophraste*.

What! Had you thought me some romantic fool?

Ridiculous at my advancing age.

These days this common folly we eschew;

Though pleasure may ensue, it's gold we seek!

THÉOPHRASTE

Of course he's right.

DORTIDIUS

And I, too, do concur.

VALÈRE

Without the thought of fortune I should not

Have put up with her presence, dull and dim.

Had she been Venus, I should still have left.

Oh! Such repellant habits I abhor.

THÉOPHRASTE

She should be warned, she must reform her ways;

She never was so tiresome in the past,

What do you think has changed her?

VALÈRE

Why, her book!

THÉOPHRASTE

And still she thinks to publish it?

VALÈRE

Why yes.

THÉOPHRASTE

If she does not change soon, she'll be locked up.

DORTIDIUS

Perhaps; though such a thing would help our cause,  
Should one day we desire her to suppress.

THÉOPHRASTE

You've read her essay on *the work of kings*?

VALÈRE

Don't speak of it! I've read it many times!  
A storm I have repeatedly endured.

DORTIDIUS, *earnestly*.

Between us three, it's truly her best work.  
But is it by her own hand?

VALÈRE

Why, you jest!

DORTIDIUS, *still serious*.

I swear, I found it excellent!

VALÈRE

Ha ha!

DORTIDIUS

I tell you, it is good!

VALÈRE

Don't make me laugh!

It's naught but incoherent silliness.

DORTIDIUS

Were I as wrong as you, I'd hold my tongue.

VALÈRE

Your heated tone disturbs me not one jot.

DORTIDIUS, *angrily*.

So, you pronounce and we must all agree?

VALÈRE

You'd think you were its author by your tone!

DORTIDIUS

If only that were true...

VALÈRE

Hard luck for you!

DORTIDIUS, *angrier*.

But my good sir!

VALÈRE

I'm speaking in good faith.

DORTIDIUS

I might be forced to tell you some hard truths!

VALÈRE

It always comes to insults when you're wrong!

DORTIDIUS

You overstep the mark!<sup>73</sup>

VALÈRE

What's more, I laugh!

DORTIDIUS, *furious*.

Ah! That's enough!

THÉOPHRASTE

Oh! Good sirs, please calm down.

DORTIDIUS

Most kind of you, to mock me quite so much!

THÉOPHRASTE, *standing between them*.

My friends, we're not the pedants of Molière.<sup>74</sup>

Allow me please, to settle this dispute.

VALÈRE

I'm right!

THÉOPHRASTE, *to Valère*.

Without a doubt.

DORTIDIUS

And I'm not wrong.

THÉOPHRASTE, *to Dortidius*.

Of course you're not. But here you might be heard,

Dear Cydalise could take us by surprise.

DORTIDIUS

Esteem should always be our dearest guide...

THÉOPHRASTE

It's not about considering ourselves;

We know each other well: but must take care,

At least, to make it seem that we are friends.

By such appearances we shall prevail,

And we are lost, unless we all unite.<sup>75</sup>

Forget these minor quarrels, for the cause.

But hark! I hear her step. Forget this row.

## SCENE IV

## THE PHILOSOPHES, CYDALISE

CYDALISE, *holding a book.*

Excuse my lateness; my thoughts were of you  
Such moments are the sweetest of the day.  
Let's sit, good sirs. Ah, Valère, is that you?  
The notary's proposal has arrived,  
I'm sure you will be pleased.

VALÈRE

My dearest wish,  
Madame, you know, is by this sacred bond,  
Our friendship may be strengthened all the more.

CYDALISE

I owe to you the joy that fills my life,  
And thank you for it dearly. But good sirs,  
I heard you speak with rage. What could it be,  
That's caused this dreadful rift? I thought to hear  
A quarrel amongst you three?

VALÈRE, *slightly embarrassed.*

It's true.

CYDALISE

Tell me

The topic you discussed with such concern?

VALÈRE

I must confess, it's you of whom we talked.

CYDALISE

Of me?

VALÈRE

Yes, you: our fervour is the proof.

CYDALISE

What is it then?

VALÈRE

Alas, I cannot say.

I know not how to praise you to your face.

Oh, speak, my friends.

THÉOPHRASTE

We may?

VALÈRE

But yes, of course.

THÉOPHRASTE

In centuries gone by we searched for one

Comparable to you. I chose to cite

Aspasia,<sup>76</sup> but this enraged Monsieur.

VALÈRE

I find it quite outrageous; here's my proof:

It's true, in Greece, Aspasia shone bright,

But in that age philosophy was young.

The people, struck by its most radiant light;

Was bound to come and worship at its source;

In those days all was new. Most common gifts

Could shine with little work, in those crude times;

But nowadays our knowledge has progressed;

And it is hard, when we've achieved so much,

To set ourselves beside those famous men

By whom barbarity was changed to light,

And thus I cannot bear, without a fight,



To hear Aspasia compared with you.

*(To Théophraste)*

Think of the times, and see then where you stand.

THÉOPHRASTE

Comparisons are never without fault.

VALÈRE

Oh, you were wrong.

THÉOPHRASTE

I know it, and I blush.

CYDALISE

And on this subject do not ask my thoughts;

I know too much...

VALÈRE, *with feeling*.

We know you are sublime.

DORTIDIUS

These are our feelings too; but hear his tone!

He beautifies them.

CYDALISE, *enthusiastically*.

Oh, indeed he does!

VALÈRE, *kissing her hand*.

Oh, pardon me then, please, this gaiety.

CYDALISE

Though I should scold, his words disarm me so:

I can't resist, *I fall under his spell*.<sup>77</sup>

DORTIDIUS

Of rousing interest he is truly king.

VALÈRE

Oh, how indulgent genius can be.

CYDALISE

Monsieur Dortidius, have you some news?

DORTIDIUS

I care nothing for kings, nor for their strife:

Nor siege nor fight means anything to me.

To idlers I leave these state affairs.

For my own land, I have but little care:

The truly wise are citizens of the world.

CYDALISE

Our homeland we hold dear, it's our sole link...

DORTIDIUS

To be mere 'citizen' constrains the mind.

Far from the torments that divide the world,

The wise man must reside at home in peace;

His eyes divert from objects of dismay;

As sole king, he both rules and legislates;

There's naught at all could shake his happiness;

It's for great men to calm the woes they cause.

THÉOPHRASTE

His view is of a philosophe, and just.

CYDALISE

His mind never appears to be at fault.

VALÈRE

Madame, he's right, the mind of such a man

Should not concern itself with politics.

These wars and treaties, trifles that they are,

Sink bit by bit into the gulf of time.  
 Pale into nothing, under genius's flame.  
 If one may speak without false modesty  
 Excepting you and us, there's not one soul  
 Who's worthy of an honest tête-à-tête.<sup>78</sup>

CYDALISE

Yes, you are right, these things aren't worth our time.

THÉOPHRASTE

We'll leave them then for much more vulgar minds.

CYDALISE

I will not challenge your authority.  
 Speaking of which, talk we of something new?

VALÈRE

There's just one thing.

CYDALISE

A masterpiece, no doubt?

VALÈRE

It's a discovery, a new approach,  
 That one of us has just begun to trace  
 A genre in which genius shines through.

CYDALISE

A tragedy?

VALÈRE

Of the domestic kind.<sup>79</sup>

That's what we seek.

CYDALISE

I'd fear a bad review;

With novel things, critique is always right.  
The public?

VALÈRE

Well, we know they are mere sheep;  
But whatsoever their verdict, we'll fight back.

CYDALISE

I'm not so sure, I fear old tastes don't change.

VALÈRE

It's true, the first few days will be a risk  
But we shall make a noise to deafen men,  
Our friends will move from *loge* to *loge* in turn,  
Their cries of praise inciting all to cheer;  
Our suppers show already such success.

CYDALISE

Why, that I had not thought, but you are right.

VALÈRE

So many do devote themselves to us,  
Low-ranking authors praise us with such pride,  
I'm sure that if we work a little more,  
Then quickly they'll abandon all good sense.

THÉOPHRASTE

Ha ha! You tell the truth just as it is.

VALÈRE

No Sir, it's without jest these things are said.

CYDALISE

And will this work be debuted soon enough?

VALÈRE

We're occupied by more important tasks.

CYDALISE

What tasks?

VALÈRE

An author of a comedy,

Will put us on the stage, they say.

CYDALISE

How bold.

DORTIDIUS, *vehemently*.

Play us! But that's a crime against the State!

Play us!

VALÈRE

But we will block this bold attack.

CYDALISE

The audience will protest...

DORTIDIUS

I fear not:

We've misled them: perhaps they'll make us pay?

CYDALISE

The magistrates will rise up in dismay.

THÉOPHRASTE

We've oft had muddy dealings with the law.

CYDALISE

The Court then...?

VALÈRE

It will never take our part,

For we have wronged it often in the past.

DORTIDIUS

Then with the author we must reason, fast.

THÉOPHRASTE

We'll see if he's afraid of us, at least.

VALÈRE

Our last resort is to wait out the storm,  
'Til then let us defame both man and work;  
Let's take revenge by arming all those fools,  
With someone else's hand take striking blows.  
Might we not buy up actors to our cause?  
We'd have supporters everywhere backstage.<sup>80</sup>  
We'll start some whisperings, cause a cabale,  
Show ourselves in the *loges*, before the crowd.  
I'm sure our faces have but to be spied:  
The public fear us.

CYDALISE

Yes, and we'll prevail.

But say, our good bookseller's late indeed.  
He should be here, what might retain him still?

DORTIDIUS

Perhaps he's waiting.

CYDALISE

We must bring him in.

THÉOPHRASTE

Ah, he is here.

SCENE V<sup>81</sup>

A LACKEY, CYDALISE, THE PHILOSOPHES

LACKEY

Madame?

CYDALISE

Has no-one come

About my books?

LACKEY

No-one.

CYDALISE, *with an agitated movement.*

Then could it be

A secret order's had them carried off?

Call Valentin!

LACKEY

He's ill, and close to death.

DORTIDIUS

Our students of anatomy will fete

His loss: their gain.

CYDALISE

He really ails?

LACKEY

Indeed.

A desperate man, Madame, nigh in the grave.

DORTIDIUS

Poor Valentin! A man I most respect,

And whose dissection I'd have carried out.

*(To Cydalise)*

But you were just about, I think, to speak;  
Begin your lesson; yet you still demur?

CYDALISE

This project, for my part, is pure caprice...

LACKEY

Your man is here.

*(He leaves.)*



## SCENE VI

M. PROPICE, CYDALISE, THE PHILOSOPHES

CYDALISE

Come in Monsieur Propice.

Have you new tomes?

M. PROPICE

Well, I don't seek them out.

Ma'am, have you read *Les Bijoux indiscrets*?

A tale of philosophic jollity;

At least that's what I'm told.

CYDALISE

A farce indeed.

But it's not new.

M. PROPICE

Still popular, I'd say.

CYDALISE

And next?

M. PROPICE

Know you the *Lettre sur les sourds*?

CYDALISE

I have it from the man himself!

DORTIDIUS

What art!

M. PROPICE

You wouldn't want, I think, *Père de famille*?<sup>82</sup>

Not cut from the same cloth.

DORTIDIUS, *ironically*.

And you would know.

M. PROPICE

It's what the public says; I think it's true.

And as for Toussaint's *Mœurs*, I do recall

I sold it to you.

(*He reads the titles*)

*Réflexions sur l'âme?*<sup>83</sup>

CYDALISE

Let's see. I know it. Is that all?

M PROPICE

Well, no.

*L'Interprétation de la nature.*

CYDALISE

Yes!

A wondrous book!

DORTIDIUS

Divine!

THEOPHRASTE

A vital text!

CYDALISE

I'll keep it, for I passed my copy on.

M. PROPICE

Here's the *Discours sur l'inégalité*.<sup>84</sup>

CYDALISE, *taking it*.

I shall reread it with avidity.

And what's this other work I see on top?

M. PROPICE

Why that's the *Petit Prophète*;<sup>85</sup> nothing, Ma'am.

CYDALISE

Ah! I recall; an entertaining read.

M. PROPICE

A never-ending stream of pleasant wit.

Require you nothing else of me today?

CYDALISE

I'll keep this one. Good day, Monsieur Propice.

SCENE VII

CYDALISE, THE PHILOSOPHES

CYDALISE

And now, once more I'll read my favourite tome!

VALÈRE

What, *Inequality*? That's mine as well.

THÉOPRASTE

The book's divine; returns all men again,

To animals, as we all are at heart!

Through making laws man has enslaved himself.

He'd lead a better life amongst the trees!

CYDALISE

Myself, I have no stronger a desire,

Than to return to our most natural state.

THÉOPRASTE

Our minds by error shrouded now persist,

By prejudice from progress we're held back.

Some erudites are cut from faulty cloth...!

CYDALISE

What now Marton?

## SCENE VIII

MARTON, CYDALISE, THE PHILOSOPHES

MARTON

Madame, a philosophe  
Has asked to speak with you.

CYDALISE

His name?

MARTON

Crispin.

CYDALISE

A most uncommon name.

DORTIDIUS

Quite so!

CYDALISE

And yet,  
What's in a name? Heavens! What a surprise!

SCENE IX

CRISPIN, CYDALISE, THE PHILOSOPHES, MARTON

CRISPIN, *on all fours*.<sup>86</sup>

Madame, there's naught to which I take offense.

No longer do I feel I must conform,

This is the glad conclusion of my thoughts.

My ardent love for *la philosophie*,

Has made me choose the state of quadruped!

On these four columns I am most at ease,

And fewer fools I see to harm my eyes.

CYDALISE, *to Valère*.

His point of view is quite original.

VALÈRE

And quite amusing.

MARTON

I think I'm in love!

CRISPIN

In civilised society all is lost:

Our health, our happiness, our virtue too.

And thus I am again an animal;

My diet is both simple and restrained.<sup>87</sup>

One cannot be content with less, it's true.

But by more frugal life, my soul's enriched.

Great fortune always seemed to me unjust;

Now I am happier and more robust,

Than those whom luxury degenerates,

The price of which their wives know all too well.

Informed of how you welcome in the wise,

Madame, I came to pay you great homage,

And to invite these men to take my lead,  
Perhaps, should they be tempted by my case.

CYDALISE

You know, I think for all his rambling words,  
I do discern some sense.

DORTIDIUS

And I agree!

MARTON

As great a philosophe as I have seen!

THEOPHRASTE

He's what we sought: a man of solid views  
Who, standing up to critics, quite convinced,  
Eschews mere words, and lives his system out.

CYDALISE

A man like that seems worthy of respect;  
Yet prejudice prevents my full assent.

CRISPIN

You find my resolution quite bizarre.

CYDALISE

I must say your example's somewhat rare;  
But your enthusiasm gives you charm;  
You are a philosophe, in every sense.

CRISPIN

I pay no mind to fashions or to fads;  
I've always thought that clothing served a use,  
And nothing more. More so in humid climes...

THEOPHRASTE

Sir, here we judge a man by what he's worth  
And not by what he wears.

CRISPIN

You're truly wise.

CYDALISE

But who is this who comes?



## SCENE X

M. CARONDAS, CYDALISE, THE PHILOSOPHES, CRISPIN, MARTON

M. CARONDAS, *stealing constant glances at Crispin, and looking uncomfortable.*

My work is done,  
Madame... and soon... the notary will come.

CYDALISE

What's wrong?

M. CARONDAS, *indicating Crispin, who is hiding a little behind Cydalise.*  
Who is that strange, amusing beast?

CYDALISE

A worthy philosophe, who'll join the feast.

CRISPIN

In truth... Madame...

M. CARONDAS, *to Valère.*

Oh damn and blast it all,  
They've found us out!

VALÈRE

But what?

M. CARONDAS

That's Crispin, Sir.

The valet of Damis.

CRISPIN, *standing.*

Yes, yes, Frontin:  
Speak up; it's him indeed.

CYDALISE

What's all this fuss?

CRISPIN, *indicating Valère.*

Your secretary is this monsieur's valet.

I took on this, the very same disguise,

To bring to you a most important note,<sup>88</sup>

(*indicating M. Carondas*)

Found in this rascal's house.

CYDALISE, *opening the note.*

I know this hand;

(*To Valère*)

It's yours, Monsieur.

CRISPIN

Pray, read it, Madame, do.

VALÈRE, *to the philosophes.*

Ah! All is lost!

CYDALISE, *reads aloud, but in a changed voice, which becomes weaker and weaker.*

'My dear Frontin, I enclose the collection of impertinences that Cydalise calls her book. Keep flattering that madwoman, who is impressed by your wise reputation. Théophraste and Dortidius have just informed me of an excellent plan which will turn her head, and to which your involvement will be of paramount importance if it is to succeed. Her ridiculous fancies, her quirks, her...'

CRISPIN

Her voice is weakening,

She will not read much more, I'm sure of that.

M. CARONDAS

Ah, traitor, Crispin!

DORTIDIUS, *to Valère.*

I am sorely vexed,

But we're found out.

VALÈRE, *quietly*.

What terrible disgrace!

What can we say? Let's go.

CYDALISE

Read on, Monsieur;

And then give your excuses, if you dare.

So, I'm the victim of your flattering plans?

On the cusp of disgrace, now I can see!

What have I done for you to treat me so?

Go, thankless guests; don't show yourselves again.

Your panicked state's revenge enough for me

Though others may not treat you quite so well.

Leave; grant the wish of my affronted heart:

Be gone.

VALÈRE, *furious*.

Oh, damn it all.

M. CARONDAS

Our cue to leave.

*(They leave.)*

CYDALISE

So cruel! How they had caught me in their web!

SCENE XI

DAMIS, ROSALIE, CYDALISE, MARTON, CRISPIN

CYDALISE

Now Damis, come; I sense what you're to say  
Will show to me just how far I've been blind.

DAMIS

They're now unmasked; the time of error's past.  
And punished, they no longer need be feared,  
Madame, you have no further cause for woe.

CYDALISE

To these infernal men I sacrificed,  
All my most sacred duties, and my friends,  
How your revenge is sweet! Dear daughter mine,  
I recognise my error; please forgive;  
To right my wrongs, I give to you Damis.

DAMIS

And I, Madame, will love you as a son.

ROSALIE

My wishes have come true, Maman returned!

CRISPIN

To now complete this tale, I'll wed Marton.

MARTON, *to the audience.*

The wise men of our time we've shown to you:  
Unmasking all that's false, we praise the true.



Anicet Charles Gabriel Lemonnier, *A Reading of Voltaire's Tragedy 'L'orpheline de la Chine' in the Salon of Madame Geoffrin* (ca. 1812), Wikimedia, Public Domain, [https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:ANICET-CHARLES-GABRIEL\\_LEMONNIER\\_A\\_READING\\_OF\\_VOLTAIRE.jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:ANICET-CHARLES-GABRIEL_LEMONNIER_A_READING_OF_VOLTAIRE.jpg)

# Lettre du Sieur Palissot, Auteur de la Comédie des *Philosophes*, pour Servir de Préface a la Pièce<sup>1</sup>

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*Vous que les Corneille, les Racine, et les Molière ont toujours respecté, et qui ne deviez pas vous attendre à vous voir insulté dans des préfaces par une secte d'hommes nouveaux qui n'ont jamais pu ni vous en imposer ni vous surprendre: vous qui êtes exempt d'intérêt, de prévention, et de haine, et à qui je dois tant de reconnaissance, permettez-moi de vous soumettre les vues<sup>2</sup> qui m'ont guidé dans l'ouvrage que vous avez eu l'indulgence d'applaudir.*

*Quelques personnes humiliées par les encouragements dont vous avez daigné m'honorer, n'osant attaquer directement votre suffrage,<sup>3</sup> ont crié du moins au libelle et à la méchanceté. J'ai cru devoir me justifier de ce reproche si étranger à mes sentiments et à mon cœur. Je vous adresse mon apologie. Lisez et jugez.<sup>4</sup>*

Une secte impérieuse, formée à l'ombre d'un ouvrage dont l'exécution pouvait illustrer le siècle,<sup>5</sup> exerçait un despotisme rigoureux sur les sciences, les lettres, les arts et les mœurs. Armée du flambeau de la philosophie, elle avait porté l'incendie dans les esprits, au lieu d'y répandre la lumière: elle attaquait la religion, les lois et la morale: elle prêchait le pyrrhonisme,<sup>6</sup> l'indépendance; et dans le temps qu'elle détruisait toute autorité, elle usurpait une tyrannie universelle. Ce n'était point assez de la liberté de publier ses opinions avec faste; elle déclarait la guerre à tout ce qui ne fléchissait pas le genou devant l'idole. *L'Encyclopédie*, cet ouvrage qui devait être le livre de la nation, en était devenu la honte; mais de ses cendres mêmes il était né des prosélytes, qui, sous le nom d'esprits forts, inspiraient à des femmes des idées d'anarchie et de matérialisme.<sup>7</sup>

Les maximes les plus détestables de Hobbes, de Spinoza, l'esprit le plus républicain, respiraient dans leurs écrits et dans leurs discours.

Les véritables philosophes, les ministres de la religion, les vrais citoyens, tous les honnêtes gens enfin gémissaient de ces dogmes audacieux contre la divinité et l'autorité suprême. On se plaignait de ce que les foudres de l'Eglise et le glaive des lois ne leur avaient porté que des coups impuissants; mais c'était plutôt des murmures que des plaintes; personne n'osait élever la voix.

Ces nouveaux philosophes croyaient en imposer à la renommée: ils distribuaient à leur gré les réputations, et les couronnes des arts; mais nul ne pouvait y prétendre, *s'il n'était enrôlé dans la secte*. En effet, elle était si étendue, elle avait si fort percé dans tous les états de la vie, qu'elle entraînait les suffrages d'une partie de la nation,<sup>8</sup> qui ne pensait plus que d'après ces oracles.

Il ne restait, pour abattre ce parti puissant, que de l'attaquer par le ridicule aux yeux mêmes du public assemblé: c'était ramener le théâtre à sa première institution;<sup>9</sup> et sans doute, il y a de la modération à n'employer que de pareilles armes contre de certains excès.

Mais il fallait avoir l'âme assez courageuse, assez enflammée (si je l'ose dire) de l'amour du bien public, pour ne s'effrayer ni des obstacles, ni des dangers. Je ne m'étais point dissimulé tout ce qu'on pourrait tenter pour me rendre odieux; j'avais prévu les applications malignes que l'on ferait des portraits répandus dans la pièce à des personnes dont je considère les talents et respecte les mœurs, sans adopter leurs systèmes philosophiques.<sup>10</sup> Si j'avais été capable de me faire à cet égard quelque illusion, j'aurais été désabusé, même avant la représentation des *Philosophes*, quand j'ai vu épars dans le public des lambeaux de ma comédie qui n'avaient jamais existé que dans l'imagination de ceux qui me les attribuaient.<sup>11</sup>

Quand j'ai entendu publier que j'attaquais ce génie rare dont je n'ai jamais parlé qu'avec transport,<sup>12</sup> qui me reçut avec tant de bonté dans sa retraite, lorsque j'allai lui porter mon tribut d'admiration, et qui depuis m'a souvent honoré de ses lettres que je conserverai toute ma vie:

Quand enfin j'ai vu que l'on m'accusait de n'avoir pas même épargné l'illustre Montesquieu, comme si nos prétendus sages se flattaient de faire disparaître, par ces imputations, l'intervalle immense qui les sépare de ces grands hommes. Si ces génies célèbres qui ont éclairé leur

siècle, se sont oubliés quelquefois par une suite de la faiblesse humaine, ce n'est point à cette populace de philosophes, qui n'a su les imiter que dans leurs fautes, à vouloir faire avec eux aucune comparaison.

Mais ce que je n'aurais jamais soupçonné, c'est que l'on affecterait d'oublier tous les exemples qui autorisent le choix de mon sujet, et la manière dont je l'ai traité: que l'on ne se souviendrait plus que Molière a joué l'Hôtel de Rambouillet,<sup>13</sup> Cotin, Ménage,<sup>14</sup> la Cour, les dévots et les médecins:<sup>15</sup> que Racine enfin a mis la magistrature sur le théâtre.<sup>16</sup>

Au reste, persuadé que la véritable philosophie du citoyen, c'est le courage d'arracher sa patrie à des erreurs dangereuses, et de sacrifier tout à cette gloire, je n'ai pu être retenu par aucune considération personnelle; pas même par la crainte des libelles dont j'ai prévu que l'on m'accablerait, et auxquels je ne répondrai jamais. Je dois me reposer du soin de ma défense sur tous ceux en qui parlent encore le respect de l'autorité, les sentiments de la nature, et les anciennes mœurs.<sup>17</sup> J'observerai seulement que les récriminations les plus odieuses ne prouveront rien ni contre ma pièce, ni en faveur des faux philosophes, mais qu'elles me donneront au contraire la satisfaction de voir les honnêtes gens joindre leur mépris au mien.

Aux reproches de méchanceté que l'on m'a faits, je n'opposerai que ces paroles judicieuses et remarquables de M. Diderot: « *Je sais qu'on dit des ouvrages où les auteurs se sont abandonnés à toute leur indignation: Cela est horrible ! On ne traite point les gens avec cette dureté-là ! Ce sont des injures grossières qui ne peuvent se lire : et autres semblables discours qu'on a tenus dans tous les temps, et de tous les ouvrages où les ridicules et la méchanceté ont été peints avec le plus de force, et que nous lisons aujourd'hui avec le plus de plaisir. Expliquons cette contradiction de nos jugements. Au moment où ces redoutables productions furent publiées, tous les méchants alarmés craignirent pour eux. Plus un homme était vicieux, plus il se plaignait hautement. Il objectait au satirique, l'âge, le rang, la dignité de la personne, et une infinité de ces petites considérations passagères qui s'affaiblissent de jour en jour, et qui disparaissent avant la fin du siècle. Les circonstances momentanées s'oublient, la postérité ne voit plus que la folie, le ridicule, le vice et la méchanceté, couverts d'ignominie, et elle s'en réjouit comme d'un acte de justice.... C'est une faiblesse répréhensible que celle qui nous empêche de montrer pour la bassesse, l'envie, la duplicité, cette haine vigoureuse et profonde que tout honnête homme doit ressentir. »<sup>18</sup>*



Après une autorité si décisive, je pourrais me passer de toute apologie: mais il est des âmes délicates et honnêtes, dont les erreurs mêmes méritent des ménagements, que le mot de méchanceté indispose, et qui ne se donnent pas toujours la peine d'examiner si l'application en est juste. C'est pour elles que j'ajouterai cette question qui me paraît si propre à les tranquilliser sur le plaisir qu'elles auraient pu prendre à ma comédie.

Quel est le méchant, ou celui qui se dévoue pour la défense de l'autorité légitime et des liens les plus sacrés de la société, ou ces hommes qui,<sup>19</sup> impatients de tout frein, ennemis de tout pouvoir, ont osé imprimer?

« Entre l'animal et l'homme il n'y a aucune *division* réelle. Les animaux ont une âme capable de toutes les opérations de l'esprit de l'homme, de concevoir, d'assembler les pensées, d'en tirer une juste conséquence. » (*Interprétation de la Nature*, page 35.)<sup>20</sup>

« Notre âme est de la même pâte et de la même fabrique que celle des animaux. » (*L'Homme plante*, page 31.)<sup>21</sup>

« Il est démontré par mille preuves sans réplique, qu'il n'y a qu'une vie et qu'une félicité, et que l'orgueilleux monarque meurt tout entier comme le sujet modeste, et le chien fidèle. » (*Discours sur la vie heureuse*, page 34 et 35.)<sup>22</sup>

« Ce qui flatte le corps, est le seul pilote qui conduise à la félicité. » (*Discours sur la vie heureuse*, page 6.)<sup>23</sup>

« Les plaisirs des sens peuvent nous inspirer toute espèce de sentiments et de vertus. »<sup>24</sup>

« La sensibilité physique et l'intérêt personnel sont les auteurs de toute justice. »

« La probité n'est que l'habitude des actions utiles, et doit nécessairement être fondée sur la base de l'intérêt personnel. »<sup>25</sup>

« L'idée de la vertu n'est point une idée absolue, et indépendante des circonstances.

« La vertu et la vérité sont des êtres qui ne valent qu'autant qu'ils servent à celui qui les possède. » (*Discours sur la vie heureuse*, page 106.)<sup>26</sup>

« Il n'y a en soi ni vice, ni vertu, ni bien, ni mal moral, ni juste, ni injuste: tout est arbitraire et fait de main d'homme. » (*Discours sur la vie heureuse*, page 11.)<sup>27</sup>

« L'inégalité des conditions est un droit barbare: aucune sujétion naturelle dans laquelle les hommes sont nés à l'égard de leur père, ou de leur prince, n'a jamais été regardée comme un lien qui les oblige, sans leur propre consentement. » (Discours préliminaire du *Dictionnaire Encyclopédique*.)<sup>28</sup>

« Un enfant ne naît sujet d'aucun pays ni d'aucun gouvernement; à l'âge de raison il est libre de choisir le gouvernement sous lequel il trouve bon de vivre, et de s'unir au corps politique qui lui plaît davantage. » (*Diction. Encyclop.* au mot Gouvernement, Tome septième, page 789.)

« Rien n'est capable de soumettre un homme à aucun pouvoir sur la terre, que son seul consentement. » (*ibid.*)<sup>29</sup>

« Le consentement tacite nous lie aux lois du gouvernement dans lequel nous jouissons de quelques possessions; mais si l'obligation commence avec les possessions, elle finit avec leur jouissance. » (*ibid.* page 791.)

« Les gouvernements peuvent se dissoudre, quand les puissances, législative et exécutive, agissent par la force au-delà de l'autorité qui leur a été commise. » (*ibid.*)<sup>30</sup>

« Ce n'est que par une suite de l'état de faiblesse et d'ignorance où naissent les enfants, qu'ils se trouvent naturellement assujettis à leurs pères et mères. » (*Ibid.* au mot Enfant Tome V. page 652.)<sup>31</sup>

« Un fils ne doit à son père aucune reconnaissance de lui avoir donné le jour. » (*Les Mœurs*, page 59.)<sup>32</sup>

« L'amour filial est très susceptible de dispense. » (*Les Mœurs*, page 459.)<sup>33</sup>

« Le vrai moyen de s'affranchir de l'importunité des désirs, est de les suivre. » (*Les Mœurs*, page 75.)<sup>34</sup>

« Pour être heureux, il faut étouffer les remords: inutiles avant le crime, ils ne servent pas plus après que quand on le commet. La bonne philosophie se déshonorerait, en s'occupant de ces fâcheuses réminiscences, et en s'arrêtant à ces vieux préjugés. » (*Discours sur la vie heureuse*, page 63.)<sup>35</sup>

La crainte de soulever mes lecteurs me fait quitter la plume, et m'empêche de parcourir les *Pensées philosophiques* et *l'Interprétation de la nature*.<sup>36</sup>



# Les Philosophes

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## ACTEURS

Cydalise

Rosalie

Damis

Valère, *philosophe*

Théophraste, *philosophe*

Dortidius, *philosophe*

Marton

Crispin

M. Propice (colporteur)

M. Carondas

*La scène est à Paris.*

## ACTE I

## SCÈNE I

DAMIS, MARTON

DAMIS

Non, je ne reviens pas d'un semblable vertige.

Rompre un hymen conclu!<sup>37</sup>

MARTON

Tout est changé, vous dis-je.

DAMIS

Mais encor ?

MARTON

Mais encor, vous êtes officier ;

Notre projet n'est pas de nous mésallier.

Nous voulons un mari taillé d'une autre étoffe ;

En un mot, nous prenons un mari philosophe.<sup>38</sup>

DAMIS

Que me dis-tu, Marton?

MARTON

Je vous étonne fort ;

Mais ne savez-vous pas que les absents ont tort ?

Trois mois ont opéré bien des métamorphoses :

Peut-être dans trois mois verrons-nous d'autres choses.

Vous pourrez reparaître alors avec succès ;

Mais jusque-là, néant. En dépit du procès

Qui devait se finir par votre mariage,

Sans appel aujourd'hui la pomme est pour le sage.

DAMIS

Le moyen que l'on change ainsi dans un moment !

MARTON

Toute femme est, monsieur, un animal changeant.<sup>39</sup>

On pourrait calculer les jours de Cydalise,

Par les différents goûts dont son âme est éprise :

Quelquefois étourdie, enjouée à l'excès,

D'autres fois sérieuse, et boudant par accès ;

Coquette, s'il en fut, en sauvant le scandale,

Prude à nous étourdir de son aigre morale ;

Courant le bal la nuit, et le jour les sermons ;

Tantôt les beaux esprits, et tantôt les bouffons.<sup>40</sup>

C'était là le bon temps. Mais aujourd'hui que l'âge

Fait place à d'autres mœurs, et veut un ton plus sage,

Madame a depuis peu réformé sa maison.

Nous n'extravaguons plus qu'à force de raison.

D'abord on a banni cette gaieté grossière,

Délices des traitants, aliment du vulgaire ;

À nos soupers décents tout au plus on sourit.

Si l'on s'ennuie, au moins c'est avec de l'esprit.

Quelquefois on admet, au lieu des vaudevilles,

De savants concertos, de grands airs difficiles ;

Car il faut bien encore un peu d'amusement.

Mais notre fort, monsieur, c'est le raisonnement.

Quelque temps, dans le cercle, on parla politique ;

Enfin tout disparut sous la métaphysique.<sup>41</sup>

DAMIS

Quelque chargé que soit ce bizarre tableau,

Je livre Cydalise aux traits de ton pinceau ;

Je m'en rapporte à toi. Mais que fait Rosalie ?

MARTON

Ce que nous faisons tous, monsieur ; elle s'ennuie.

DAMIS

Aux vœux de mon rival son cœur s'est-il rendu ?

MARTON

Non, ce cœur est à vous. L'amour l'a défendu  
Contre tous les projets d'un rival téméraire ;  
Mais votre sort dépend de l'aveu d'une mère,  
Ensorcelée au point que je n'ai plus d'espoir.  
Pardonnez-moi ce mot ; je vois comme il faut voir.

DAMIS

Elle fut mon amie, et je me flatte encore...

MARTON

Le bel esprit, monsieur, est tout ce qu'elle adore.  
C'est une maladie inconnue à vingt ans ;  
Mais bien forte à cinquante. Encore avec le temps,  
On pourrait espérer un retour de sagesse,  
S'il en était quelqu'un contre cette faiblesse,  
Quand à certains degrés elle a fait des progrès.  
Dans les commencements, moi-même j'espérais ;  
Mais sachez tous nos maux et ceux qui vont les suivre.  
Entre nous.

DAMIS

Hé bien ? quoi ?

MARTON

Madame a fait un livre.

DAMIS

Bon !

MARTON

Qui même à présent s'imprime *incognito*.

DAMIS

Quelque brochure ?

MARTON

Non : un volume *in-quarto*.

DAMIS

Je lui conseille fort de garder l'anonyme.

Mais, dans ces beaux esprits que Cydalise estime,  
N'en est-il donc aucun assez droit, assez franc,  
Pour lui montrer l'excès d'un travers aussi grand ;  
Pour la désabuser ?

MARTON

Eux ! Ils se moquent d'elle ;  
Ils ont tous conspiré de gâter sa cervelle ;  
Surtout votre rival. Comme il connaît son goût,  
Il ne se borne pas à l'applaudir en tout ;  
Il la fait admirer par messieurs ses semblables,  
Tous charlatans adroits, et flatteurs agréables,  
Ravis de présider dans sa société,  
D'y porter leurs erreurs, et faisant vanité  
De dominer ici sur un esprit crédule,  
Qu'ils ont l'art d'aguerrir contre le ridicule.

DAMIS

Et ce sont-là, dis-tu, des philosophes ?

MARTON

Oui ;

Du plus grand air encor. Paris en est rempli.  
Mais pour établir mieux leur crédit chez madame,  
Et pour mieux pénétrer jusqu'au fond de son âme,  
Ils nomment aux emplois vacants dans la maison.



Leur choix, toujours guidé par la saine raison,  
Quel qu'il soit, à madame est toujours sûr de plaire.  
Je soupçonne pourtant un certain secrétaire,  
Reçu par Cydalise à titre de savant,  
De n'avoir d'autre emploi que celui d'intrigant,  
De recéler un fourbe, et d'être ici pour cause ;  
Mais enfin, tôt ou tard, j'éclaircirai la chose.

DAMIS

Quel motif as-tu donc pour en juger si mal ?

MARTON

Ou je me trompe fort, ou c'est votre rival  
Qui pour servir ses feux ici l'impatronise.

DAMIS

Quel homme est-ce ?

MARTON

Un fripon affectant la franchise,  
Et pourtant, m'a-t-on dit, natif de Pézenas,  
Titré du nom pompeux de Monsieur Carondas,  
Reconnu pour savant, du moins sur sa parole,  
Tout hérissé de grec et de termes d'école,  
Plaçant à tout propos ce bizarre jargon,  
Et nous citant sans cesse Homère ou Lycophron.<sup>42</sup>

DAMIS, *riant*.

Ha, ha, ha, ha, ha, ha.

MARTON

Je peins d'après nature.

DAMIS

Ce Monsieur Carondas est de mauvais augure ;

Mais avec ton secours et celui de Crispin...

MARTON

Quoi ! Crispin est ici ?

DAMIS

Vraiment oui. Mon dessein

Était de vous unir ; tu le sais, et j'espère

Que tu me serviras de ton mieux.

MARTON

Laissez faire.

Crispin est fort adroit ; j'en tirerai parti.

DAMIS

Je compte sur tes soins.

MARTON

Oh ! Monsieur, comptez-y.

Je déclare la guerre à la philosophie.

DAMIS

Je te devrai, Marton, le bonheur de ma vie.

Mais... Ne puis-je un moment ? ...

MARTON

Ah ! Je vous vois venir.

Tenez, monsieur ; l'amour a su vous prévenir :

On vient ; c'est Rosalie.

## SCÈNE II

ROSALIE, MARTON, DAMIS

DAMIS

Après trois mois d'absence,  
Quand je reviens ici, guidé par l'espérance,  
Réclamer une foi promise à mon ardeur,  
On m'apprend qu'un rival, jaloux de mon bonheur,  
Ose me disputer le seul bien où j'aspire,<sup>43</sup>  
Qu'avec lui, contre moi, votre mère conspire.  
Ah ! rassurez du moins mon cœur désespéré.

ROSALIE

Doutez-vous que le mien en soit moins pénétré ?  
Je vois avec douleur ce changement extrême,  
Je souffre autant que vous ; mais enfin je vous aime.  
À ce titre du moins quelque espoir m'est permis.  
Qui pourrait résister à deux amants unis ?  
Ma mère vous aimait. En vous voyant, peut-être,  
Dans son cœur combattu, l'amitié va renaître.  
Sur ce cœur autrefois j'avais plus de pouvoir,  
Je le sais ! c'est à vous, Damis, de l'émouvoir ;  
Allez, et pour combler le bonheur que j'espère,  
Que je vous doive encor les bontés de ma mère.

MARTON

Beaux sentiments ! Mais moi, je ne m'y fierais pas.

ROSALIE

Laisse-moi mon erreur.

MARTON

Non : c'est par des combats  
Qu'il faut à la raison ramener Cydalise.

DAMIS

Encore est-il permis de tenter l'entreprise.

MARTON

Oui ; c'est un beau moyen, des soupirs et des pleurs !

Oh ! la philosophie endurecît trop les cœurs.

ROSALIE

Je ne l'aurais pas cru ! mais pourtant, si ma mère

M'immolait sans retour aux desseins de Valère,

Si ce projet enfin était bien avéré,

Pourquoi jusqu'à présent n'est-il pas déclaré ?

Qui peut la retenir ?

MARTON

J'entrerais en colère.

Elle n'a pas encor fait venir le notaire,

Il est vrai ; les témoins ne sont pas invités,

D'accord ; il manque aussi quelques formalités,

J'y consens ; il se peut d'ailleurs que la journée

Ne soit pas fixement encor déterminée ;

J'en conviens. Cependant ne souffre-t-elle pas

L'hommage assez public qu'il rend à vos appas ?

N'en êtes-vous pas même à toute heure obsédée ?

Mais non ; je me trompais : ce n'était qu'une idée.

ROSALIE

Hélas ! peux-tu, Marton, me désoler ainsi ?

MARTON

J'avais rêvé.

DAMIS

Marton...

MARTON

Contes que tout ceci,  
Propos en l'air.

DAMIS

Marton.

MARTON

Vision chimérique,  
Absurde.

ROSALIE

Mais Marton...

MARTON

Non, c'est terreur panique,  
Illusion, vous dis-je.

ROSALIE

En vérité, Marton,  
Ce cruel badinage est bien peu de saison.

MARTON

J'avais tort.

ROSALIE, *faisant un mouvement pour sortir.*

Tu poursuis ? Hé bien ! je...

DAMIS, *l'arrêtant.*

Rosalie.

ROSALIE

Non, monsieur, c'en est trop.

DAMIS

Demeurez, je vous prie.

MARTON

Ah ! Vous vous fâchez donc ? Vraiment, c'est très bien fait.

Mais raisonnons un peu. Dites-moi, s'il vous plaît,

Fallait-il vous tromper ? Je sais bien que le doute

Suspend l'impression des maux que l'on redoute,

Qu'il est très naturel d'éloigner le danger,

Et de rendre toujours son fardeau plus léger.

Moi-même à vous flatter je serais la première.

J'aurais soin de fermer les yeux à la lumière,

Sans l'intérêt pressant qui me parle pour vous.

Pardonnez ; mais, ma foi, les amants sont des fous.

Tranquilles sans raison, désespérés sans cause,

Dans un juste équilibre aucun ne se repose,

Et le sang froid souvent les conseille bien mieux,

Que cet amour qu'on peint un bandeau sur les yeux.

DAMIS

Comment ! Voilà, parbleu, de la philosophie !

MARTON

On apprend à hurler, dit-on, de compagnie,

En fréquentant les loups. Le proverbe a raison.

C'est un mal répandu dans toute la maison,

Mais perdons un moment cette idée importune.

(À Rosalie)

Çà, faisons notre paix. Vous serez sans rancune ?

Vous me le promettez ?

ROSALIE

Oh ! je te le promets !

MARTON

Et moi d'être attentive à tous vos intérêts.

Vous, monsieur, qui sans soins et sans trouble dans l'âme,  
Passeriez votre vie à regarder madame,  
Il faut battre en retraite, et même promptement.  
Songez qu'il est grand jour dans cet appartement,  
Que nous pourrions ici risquer quelque surprise,  
Et qu'il faut vous montrer d'abord à Cydalise,  
Avant que de penser à d'autres rendez-vous.

DAMIS

Je cours m'y disposer, dans un espoir si doux.  
Je remets en tes mains le bonheur de ma vie.  
Vous que j'adore, adieu, ma chère Rosalie.

SCÈNE III

MARTON, ROSALIE

MARTON

Vous, soyez sans faiblesse. Allons, point de langueur.  
La fermeté, madame, en impose au malheur.<sup>44</sup>

ROSALIE

Si tu pouvais sentir combien je hais Valère !

MARTON

Oui : Damis sort d'ici. Mais c'est à votre mère  
Qu'il importe surtout de parler avec feu.  
Si vous aimez Damis, ce fut de son aveu ;  
Je le suppose au moins.

ROSALIE

Certainement.

MARTON

Les filles

Ne font rien, comme on sait, sans l'avis des familles,  
C'est la règle. Il faut donc déclarer sans détour  
Pour l'un tous vos mépris, pour l'autre votre amour.

ROSALIE

Oh ! oui.

MARTON

Vous sentez-vous cette fermeté d'âme ?

ROSALIE

Assurément, Marton.

MARTON, *malignement*.

Allons, j'entends madame.



ROSALIE, *effrayée*.

Ah ? Marton...

MARTON

Comment donc ! c'est très bien débiter.

Cela promet.

ROSALIE

Aussi, pourquoi m'épouvanter ?

L'amour dans le besoin me rendra du courage.

MARTON, *la contrefaisant*.

L'amour ! oui vous ferez tous deux de bel ouvrage.

Il y paraît vraiment, à cet air d'embarras,

Qu'un mot dit au hasard...

ROSALIE

Mais enfin tu verras.

MARTON

Ce n'est point à l'amour à vous tirer de peine,

Il est trop mal adroit. Pensez à votre haine ;

Voilà le sentiment qui doit vous inspirer,

Dont il est important de vous bien pénétrer.

Je ne sais si l'amour, que d'ailleurs je révère,

Est de nos passions en effet la plus chère ;

Mais ce n'est que faiblesse, et que timidité.

La haine n'est qu'ardeur et que vivacité.

L'un abat, l'autre anime, et dans un cœur femelle,

Ma foi, je la croirais beaucoup plus naturelle.

Vous ne connaissez pas encor ce sentiment.

Que votre cœur l'éprouve aujourd'hui seulement.

Tenez, j'aime Crispin, et je sens pour Valère...

Mais, ce n'est plus un jeu, j'aperçois votre mère.

ROSALIE

Tu me soutiendras ?

MARTON

Oui.

## SCÈNE IV

CYDALISE, ROSALIE, MARTON

CYDALISE

Retirez-vous, Marton.

Prenez mes clefs, allez renfermer mon Platon.

De son monde idéal j'ai la tête engourdie.

J'attendais à l'instant mon *Encyclopédie* ;

Ce livre ne doit plus quitter mon cabinet.

(À Rosalie)

Vous, demeurez ; je veux vous parler en secret.

(À Marton)

Laissez-nous, Marton.

MARTON, à Rosalie.

Allons, ferme, et montrez du courage

CYDALISE

Obéissez, Marton.

SCÈNE V

CYDALISE, ROSALIE

CYDALISE

Vous êtes belle et sage,  
Rosalie, et pour vous j'eus toujours des bontés.  
Je vais connaître enfin si vous les méritez.  
Je ne consulte point ce sentiment vulgaire,  
Amour de préjugé, trivial, populaire,  
Que l'on croit émané du sang qui parle en nous,  
Et qui n'est, dans le fond, qu'un mensonge assez doux,  
Une faiblesse...

ROSALIE

Hé quoi ! la voix de la nature,  
Quoi ! cette impression si touchante et si pure,  
Ce premier des devoirs, cet auguste lien,  
(Je définirai mal ce que je sens si bien,)   
N'importe, se peut-il que le cœur de ma mère  
Méconnaisse aujourd'hui ce sacré caractère ?  
Ah ! rappelez pour moi vos sentiments passés.  
En les analysant, vous les affaiblissez.

CYDALISE

J'ai cru, tout comme une autre, à ces vaines chimères,  
Dignes du gros bon sens qui conduisait nos pères.  
Crédule, heureuse même en mon aveuglement,  
Automate abusé, je suivais le torrent.  
Je commence à sentir, à penser, à connaître.  
Si je vous aime enfin, c'est en qualité d'Être :  
Mais vous concevez bien qu'un autre individu  
N'aurait à mes bontés qu'un droit moins étendu.

ROSALIE

Vous déchirez mon cœur. Ah ! permettez, madame,  
Souffrez qu'à vos genoux votre fille réclame  
Un droit plus légitime et des titres plus doux.  
Pourquoi briser les nœuds qui m'attachaient à vous ?  
Jugez de leur pouvoir à mon trouble, à mes larmes.

CYDALISE, *un peu émue.*

Ma fille !... Hé quoi ! pour vous l'erreur a tant de charmes !  
Vous me faites pitié. Consultez la raison.  
Ces puérilités ne sont plus de saison.  
Je reconnais vos droits sur le cœur d'une mère ;  
Mais je les anoblis, et si je vous suis chère,  
Si j'ai sur vous aussi quelques droits à mon tour  
J'en exclus le hasard, qui vous donna le jour.

ROSALIE

Je ne puis soutenir ce funeste langage.  
Il fait à toutes deux un trop sensible outrage.  
Qui ? moi ! Le pensez-vous, que je puisse jamais  
Oublier que ma vie est un de vos bienfaits ?  
Non...

CYDALISE

Le soin que j'ai pris de votre intelligence  
Doit mériter, surtout, votre reconnaissance ;  
Voilà le digne objet où tendent tous mes vœux.  
Vous apprendre à penser, voilà ce que je veux.  
Concevez le bonheur d'étendre son génie,  
D'ouvrir l'œil aux clartés de la philosophie,  
De dissiper la nuit où vos sens sont plongés,  
D'affranchir votre esprit du joug des préjugés !  
Ce grand art d'exister, qui n'appartient qu'au sage,

Dont je connais enfin le solide avantage,  
Ce jour de la raison, dont j'ai su m'éclairer,  
Ma fille, mon amour veut vous le procurer.  
J'avais avec Damis conclu votre hyménée.  
De légers intérêts m'avaient déterminée.  
Des rapports de fortune, un procès à finir,  
Je me souviens qu'alors tout semblait vous unir.  
C'est ainsi que se font la plupart des affaires ;  
Mais enfin, aujourd'hui je romps ces nœuds vulgaires.  
Damis a du bon sens, des vertus, de l'honneur,  
Il a ce que le monde exige à la rigueur :  
Tout mortel n'est pas fait pour aller au sublime ;  
Dans le fond, cependant, on lui doit de l'estime :  
Mais je vous dois aussi, ma fille, un autre époux,  
Beaucoup plus convenable et plus digne de vous.  
Valère a ce qu'il faut pour plaire et pour séduire,  
C'est peu de vous aimer, il saura vous instruire ;  
En un mot, c'est de lui que mon cœur a fait choix.

ROSALIE

Ainsi, vous oubliez que Damis autrefois  
Eut votre aveu, madame, et celui de mon père ?

CYDALISE

Votre père ! Il est vrai que je n'y songeais guère.  
Plaisante autorité que la sienne en effet !  
L'être le plus borné que la nature ait fait.  
Nul talent, nul essor, espèce de machine  
Allant par habitude, et pensant par routine,  
Ayant l'air de rêver et ne songeant à rien,  
Gravement occupé du détail de son bien,  
Et de mille autres soins purement domestiques ;

Défenseur ennuyeux des préjugés gothiques,  
Sauvage dans ses mœurs, alliant à la fois  
La morgue de sa robe au ton le plus bourgeois ;  
Ne s'énonçant jamais qu'avec poids et mesure,  
Et qui toujours grimpé sur la magistrature,  
Hors de son tribunal, aurait cru déroger ;  
Ayant comme Dandin,<sup>45</sup> la fureur de juger.  
Mais il est mort enfin, laissons en paix sa cendre.

ROSALIE

Ah ! madame, songez...

CYDALISE

Allez-vous le défendre ?

Un père n'est qu'un homme, et l'on peut sensément  
Remarquer ses défauts, en parler librement.

ROSALIE

Si ce sont-là les droits de la philosophie,  
Souffrez que j'y renonce, et pour toute ma vie.  
Je perdrais trop, madame, à m'éclairer ainsi ;  
J'ose vous l'avouer. Daignez permettre aussi  
Qu'en faveur de Damis je vous rappelle encore  
Vos premières bontés que votre fille implore.

CYDALISE.

Non, Valère est l'amant que j'ai choisi pour vous,  
Ma fille, et dès ce soir il sera votre époux.  
Ces nœuds embelliront le cours de votre vie.  
Quant à vos préjugés sur la philosophie,  
Contre eux, à mon exemple, il faut vous aguerir.  
Le temps et la raison sauront vous en guérir.  
Vous êtes dans cet âge où l'on commence à vivre,

Tout fait ombrage alors ; mais vous lirez mon livre.  
J'y traite en abrégé de l'esprit, du bon sens,  
Des passions, des lois, et des gouvernements ;  
De la vertu, des mœurs, du climat, des usages,  
Des peuples policés et des peuples sauvages ;  
Du désordre apparent, de l'ordre universel,  
Du bonheur idéal et du bonheur réel.  
J'examine avec soin les principes des choses,  
L'enchaînement secret des effets et des causes.  
J'ai fait exprès pour vous un chapitre profond,  
Je veux l'intituler : *Les devoirs, tels qu'ils sont*.  
Enfin, c'est en morale une encyclopédie,  
Et Valère l'appelle un livre de génie.  
Vous serez trop heureuse avec un tel époux.  
Un jour vous connaîtrez ce que je fais pour vous ;  
Vous m'en remercirez. Adieu, mademoiselle,  
Songez à m'obéir.



## SCÈNE VI

ROSALIE, MARTON

ROSALIE, *sans voir Marton.*

Quelle douleur mortelle !

Que résoudre ? Que faire ? Ah ! te voilà, Marton.

MARTON

Oui, j'ai tout entendu. Mais quelle déraison !

Quel travers !

ROSALIE

Je n'ai plus qu'à mourir.

MARTON

Badinage :

Mourir ! Vous vous moquez, et ce n'est plus l'usage.

On ne le souffre pas même dans les romans.

ROSALIE

Mais enfin...

MARTON

Calmez-vous, et reprenez vos sens.

Cette crise, après tout, vous l'aviez attendue ?

ROSALIE

Mon âme en ce moment n'en est pas moins émue.

MARTON

Présumez vous si peu du succès de mes soins ?

ROSALIE

Ah ! Marton...

MARTON

Commencez par vous affliger moins.

Si vos vœux sont comblés, dites-moi, je vous prie,  
À quoi ce beau chagrin vous aura-t-il servie ?

ROSALIE

Oui, si tu réussis ; mais qui m'en répondra ?

MARTON

Vous pleurerez alors autant qu'il vous plaira,  
Je vous aiderai même, et n'aurai rien à dire ;  
Mais jusqu'à ce moment, qui vous défend de rire ?  
À tout évènement, c'est toujours fort bien fait,  
Et quand tout irait mal, je crois qu'il le faudrait.  
Du moins c'est mon humeur. Le chagrin m'incommode.  
Je le crois inutile, et j'en suis l'antipode.  
C'est à quoi dans la vie il faut le moins songer,  
Et l'on a toujours tort, quand on veut s'affliger.  
Mais allons concerter quelque heureuse saillie,  
Venez, et nous verrons si la philosophie,  
Quelque soit son crédit, pourra dans ce grand jour  
Tenir contre Marton, et Crispin, et l'amour.

## ACTE II

## SCÈNE I

VALÈRE, M. CARONDAS

VALÈRE

Frontin!

M. CARONDAS

Ce maudit nom fera quelque méprise,  
Je vous l'ai déjà dit, et devant Cydalise  
Il vous arrivera de me nommer ainsi.  
Frontin ! pour un savant le beau nom ! songez-y,  
Monsieur, il ne faudrait que cette étourderie  
Pour donner du dessous à la philosophie.

VALÈRE

D'accord.

M. CARONDAS

Il faut d'ailleurs supprimer entre nous  
Les tons trop familiers, puisqu'enfin, selon vous,  
Les hommes sont égaux par le droit de nature,  
Je suis, quoique Frontin, votre égal.

VALÈRE

Je te jure

Que c'est mon sentiment.

M. CARONDAS

Moi, je l'approuve fort.  
J'avais toujours pensé que les lois avaient tort ;  
Et même Cydalise, en un certain chapitre,  
Ne prouve point trop mal à mon gré...

VALÈRE

Le beau titre

Que l'avis d'une folle à qui dans un moment  
On ferait adopter tout autre sentiment ;  
Qui ne sait que des mots, et n'a rien dans la tête.

M. CARONDAS

Nais entre nous, monsieur, son livre est-il si bête ?

VALÈRE

Pitoyable.

M. CARONDAS

Le style...

VALÈRE

Ennuyeux à l'excès.

M. CARONDAS

Vous la flattez pourtant du plus brillant succès.

VALÈRE

Sans doute.

M. CARONDAS

Et le public?

VALÈRE

Nous savons lui prescrire

Comment il faut penser, parler, juger, écrire ;  
Nous le déciderons aisément.

M. CARONDAS

D'accord ; mais

Il faut l'apprivoiser, le flatter.

VALÈRE

Non, jamais.

Il est, pour le gagner, des méthodes plus sûres.

M. CARONDAS

Le moyen ?

VALÈRE

Par exemple, on lui dit des injures.<sup>46</sup>

C'est un expédient par nos sages trouvé ;

Le secret est certain, nous l'avons éprouvé.

Dans peu, tu le verras toi-même avec surprise,

Nous porterons aux cieux le nom de Cydalise ;

Cinq ou six traits hardis, révoltants, scandaleux,

Produiront dans son livre un effet merveilleux.

Il faut les ajouter.

M. CARONDAS

Bon ! La ruse est nouvelle !

Et comment lui prouver que ces traits-là sont d'elle ?

VALÈRE

Et le reste en est-il ? D'abord avec pudeur

Elle s'en défendra, puis s'en croira l'auteur.

M. CARONDAS

Je ne sais ; mais pour moi, je rougirais dans l'âme...

VALÈRE

As-tu donc oublié que Cydalise est femme ?

Crois-moi, suppose encore un piège plus grossier,

L'amour propre est crédule, et l'on peut s'y fier.

Les femmes sur ce point sont même assez sincères.

M. CARONDAS

Messieurs les beaux esprits ne leur en doivent guères.

Mais enfin vous croyez qu'avec cinq ou six traits

Nous devons nous attendre au plus heureux succès ?

VALÈRE

Sans doute, et cette idée, entre nous, n'est pas neuve.

Le livre de Cratès<sup>47</sup> n'en est-il pas la preuve ?

Jamais production ne prit un tel essor.

Chacun se l'arrachait, on se l'arrache encor :

Pour livre dangereux partout on le renomme,

Et pourtant nous savons que Cratès est bon homme.

M. CARONDAS

Il est vrai.

VALÈRE

Cydalise aura plus de faveur.

On ne juge jamais son sexe à la rigueur.

Quelques-uns de ces traits qu'on se dit à l'oreille,

Au public hébété feront crier merveille !

Je veux que Cratès même en devienne jaloux,

Et rien n'est plus aisé, nous la protégeons tous.

M. CARONDAS

Hé bien, quoique nourri, monsieur, à votre école,

J'avais, tout bonnement, admiré sur parole

Et l'ouvrage et l'auteur. Car enfin, mot à mot,

Elle n'a rien écrit que d'après vous.

VALÈRE

Le sot !

M. CARONDAS

Mais pour ces beaux endroits ajoutés à son livre,  
Si les lois s'avisaient, monsieur, de nous poursuivre.

VALÈRE

Elle aurait le plaisir de s'entendre louer ;  
N'est-ce rien ? Quitte après à tout désavouer.  
D'ailleurs l'amour du vrai va jusqu'à l'héroïsme.  
Ces grands mots imposants d'*erreur*, de *fanatisme*,  
De *persécution*, viendraient à son secours.<sup>48</sup>  
C'est un ressort usé qui réussit toujours.  
N'avons-nous pas encor l'exemple de Socrate  
Opprimé, condamné par sa patrie ingrate ?<sup>49</sup>  
Tous nos admirateurs parleraient à la fois.

M. CARONDAS

Mais, monsieur, ce Socrate obéissait aux lois.

VALÈRE

Oui, la philosophie encor dans son enfance  
Des préjugés du moins conservait l'apparence ;  
Mais nous n'en voulons plus.

CARONDAS

Tout devient donc permis ?

VALÈRE

Excepté contre nous et contre nos amis.

CARONDAS

Vive le bel esprit et la philosophie !  
Rien n'est mieux inventé pour adoucir la vie.

VALÈRE<sup>50</sup>

Comment ! Sur des rochers on plaçait la vertu ?  
Y grimpait qui pouvait. L'homme était méconnu.

Ce roi des animaux, sans guide et sans boussole,  
Sur l'océan du monde errait au gré d'Éole ;  
Mais enfin nous savons quel est son vrai moteur.  
L'homme est toujours conduit par l'attrait du bonheur,  
C'est dans ses passions qu'il en trouve la source.  
Sans elles, le mobile arrêté dans sa course  
Languirait tristement à la terre attaché.<sup>51</sup>  
Ce pouvoir inconnu, ce principe caché,  
N'a pu se dérober à la philosophie,  
Et la morale enfin est soumise au génie.  
Du globe où nous vivons despote universel,  
Il n'est qu'un seul ressort, l'intérêt personnel ;  
À tous nos sentiments, c'est lui seul qui préside ;  
C'est lui qui dans nos choix nous éclaire et nous guide.  
Libre de préjugés ; mais docile à sa voix,  
Le sauvage attentif le suit au fond des bois.  
L'homme civilisé reconnaît son empire ;  
Il commande en un mot à tout ce qui respire.

M. CARONDAS

Quoi ! monsieur, l'intérêt doit seul être écouté ?

VALÈRE

La nature en a fait une nécessité.

M. CARONDAS

J'avais quelque regret à tromper Cydalise ;  
Mais je vois clairement que la chose est permise.

VALÈRE

La fortune t'appelle, il faut la prendre au mot.

M. CARONDAS

Oui, monsieur.



VALÈRE

La franchise est la vertu d'un sot.

M. CARONDAS, *se disposant à le voler.*

Oui, monsieur... mais toujours je sens quelque scrupule  
Qui voudrait m'arrêter.

VALÈRE

Préjugé ridicule,  
Dont il faut s'affranchir !

M. CARONDAS

Quoi ! véritablement ?

VALÈRE

Il s'agit d'être heureux, il n'importe comment.

M. CARONDAS

Tout de bon ?

VALÈRE

Mais sans doute, en flattant Cydalise,  
Tu remplis un devoir que l'usage autorise.  
Ne faut-il pas flatter quand on veut plaire aux gens ?  
Bien voir ses intérêts, c'est être de bon sens.  
Le superflu des sots est notre patrimoine.  
Ce que dit un corsaire au roi de Macédoine,  
Est très vrai dans le fond.

M. CARONDAS, *fouillant dans la poche de Valère.*

Oui, monsieur.

VALÈRE

Tous les biens  
Devraient être communs ; mais il est des moyens  
De se venger du sort. On peut avec adresse

Corriger son étoile, et c'est une faiblesse  
Que de se tourmenter d'un scrupule éternel.  
(*Valère s'apercevant que Carondas veut le voler*)  
Mais que fais-tu donc là ?

M. CARONDAS

L'intérêt personnel...  
Ce principe caché... monsieur... qui nous inspire,  
Et qui commande enfin à tout ce qui respire...

VALÈRE

Quoi ! traître, me voler !

M. CARONDAS

Non. J'use de mon droit,  
Tous les biens sont communs.

VALÈRE

Oui, mais sois plus adroit.  
Il est certains malheurs auxquels on se hasarde,  
Lorsque l'on est surpris.

M. CARONDAS

Monsieur, j'y prendrai garde.

VALÈRE

Ceci, Monsieur Frontin, doit être une leçon ;  
Mais puisqu'il ne faut plus vous nommer de ce nom,  
Songez à me servir auprès de Cydalise.  
Jusqu'ici, tout va bien ; sa fille m'est promise.  
Vous savez là-dessus quels sont mes sentiments,  
Ainsi continuez de flatter ses talents.  
Vos termes de collègue ont produit des merveilles ;  
Il faut de plus en plus étourdir ses oreilles,  
De ce jargon savant qui vous a réussi.

Vous êtes sans fortune, et vous pouvez ici  
Vous faire un petit sort que j'aurai soin d'étendre,  
Si mes vœux ont l'effet que j'ai droit d'en attendre.  
Adieu, soyez discret, je serai généreux.

SCÈNE II

M. CARONDAS, *seul*.

Mon premier coup d'essai n'est pas des plus heureux.

Je suis encor trop loin d'atteindre mon modèle,

Et c'est au second rang que le destin m'appelle.

## SCÈNE III

CYDALISE, M. CARONDAS

CYDALISE, *sans voir M. Carondas.*

Me voilà parvenue à m'en débarrasser.

Que l'oisiveté pèse alors qu'on veut penser !

Parmi tous ces fâcheux dont j'étais obsédée,

Je n'ai pas entrevu le germe d'une idée.

On ne peut à ce point outrager le bon sens ;

Mais il faut tout souffrir de messieurs ses parents.

(À M. Carondas)

Ah ! vous êtes ici. Bon ! prenez votre place.

Mon livre va paraître, on attend la préface,

Il faut y travailler. J'aurais voulu pourtant

Que nous eussions Valère.

M. CARONDAS

Il me quitte à l'instant,

Et nous parlions de vous, madame, avec ivresse.

CYDALISE

Vous parliez de mon livre ?

M. CARONDAS

Il en parle sans cesse.

C'est, dit-il, un brevet pour l'immortalité ;

Vous allez éclipser la docte antiquité.

Je n'ose avec le sien mesurer mon suffrage ;

Mais l'admiration me prend à chaque page.

CYDALISE

Vous en êtes content ?

M. CARONDAS

Mon esprit s'y confond.

Votre livre est nourri d'un savoir si profond

Que vous me feriez croire au démon de Socrate.<sup>52</sup>

CYDALISE

Vous vous y connaissez.

M. CARONDAS

Oui, madame, on m'en flatte.

Mais apprenez-moi donc comment cela se fit ?

Il faut que vous sachiez tout ce qui s'est écrit.

CYDALISE

Avec nombre de gens je me suis rencontrée,

Et c'est un pur hasard.

M. CARDONAS

Vous étiez inspirée.

Quoi ! vous n'avez pas lu le savant Vossius ?<sup>53</sup>

CYDALISE

Non, jamais.

M. CARONDAS

Casaubon?<sup>54</sup>

CYDALISE

Encor moins.

M. CARONDAS

Grotius?<sup>55</sup>

CYDALISE

Point du tout. Sont-ce là les livres d'une femme ?

M. CARONDAS

Ma foi, de plus en plus vous m'étonnez, madame,  
Quoi ! rien de tout cela ?

CYDALISE

Non, rien, vous dis-je, rien.

M. CARONDAS

Mais vous parlez des lois mieux que Tribonien.<sup>56</sup>  
Oh ! pour Tribonien, convenez...

CYDALISE

Je l'ignore.

M. CARONDAS

Vous connaissez du moins Thalès, Anaxagore ?<sup>57</sup>

CYDALISE

Non.

M. CARONDAS

*Le Fils naturel?*<sup>58</sup>

CYDALISE

Pour celui-là, d'accord.

Ce sont de ces écrits qu'il faut citer d'abord.

M. CARONDAS

Je ne veux point ici m'ériger en arbitre ;  
Mais j'en aurais jugé, comme vous, sur le titre.

CYDALISE

C'est aussi mon avis, et je crois qu'en effet  
Un ouvrage excellent s'annonce au moindre trait.  
C'est un je ne sais quoi... dont notre âme est saisie...  
Cela se sent... enfin c'est l'attrait du génie.

M. CARONDAS

J'entends. C'est à peu près la vapeur d'un ragoût  
Qui réveille à la fois l'odorat et le goût.

CYDALISE

Oui ; la comparaison est pourtant trop vulgaire.

M. CARONDAS

Elle est de Lycophron.<sup>59</sup>

CYDALISE

Ah ! C'est une autre affaire.

Venons à ma préface. Allons, je vais dicter.

*(Après un silence et avec emphase.)*

Écrivez : *J'ai vécu*.<sup>60</sup> Non, c'est mal débiter.

Effacez, *J'ai vécu*. Mettez-vous à votre aise.

*(Avec de l'aigreur.)*

Ah! monsieur Carondas, votre plume est mauvaise.

*(Elle rêve.)*

*J'ai vécu* ne vaut rien.

M. CARONDAS

Je m'en contenterais.

*J'ai vécu*, dit beaucoup !

CYDALISE

Non, monsieur, je voudrais

Un début plus pompeux et plus philosophique.

M. CARONDAS

Cette simplicité, madame, est énergique.

CYDALISE, *rêvant*.

Non, non, je cherche un tour qui soit moins familier.

*(Avec humeur.)*



On n'a jamais écrit sur de pareil papier  
Effacez donc, monsieur ; votre encre est détestable.

*(Elle rêve.)*

Je ne pourrai trouver un tour plus favorable !

*(Avec impatience.)*

Ah ! Valère, après tout, devrait bien être ici.  
Je ne me sens jamais tant d'esprit qu'avec lui.

*(Elle rêve.)*

Quoi ! pas même une idée ? Ah ! je suis au supplice.

M. CARONDAS

Madame, le génie a ses jours de caprice,  
Et ceci me rappelle un mot de Suidas, <sup>61</sup>  
Qui dit élégamment...

CYDALISE

Hé ! Monsieur Carondas,

Laissez les morts en paix. J'avais un trait sublime,

*(Elle rêve.)*

Qui m'échappe. Attendez... mais, oui ; ce tour exprime...

*(Avec impatience.)*

Écrivez. Non, la phrase a trop d'obscurité.

Je ne sentis jamais cette stérilité.

Quel métier ! Finissons. C'en est fait, j'y renonce.

L'imprimeur attendra, portez-lui ma réponse.

Non, revenez. Enfin je l'ai trouvé : j'y suis.

Vite, écrivez, monsieur : *jeune homme, prends et lis.*<sup>62</sup>

*Jeune homme prends et lis.* Le tour est-il unique ?

Qu'en pensez-vous, monsieur ?

M. CARONDAS

Sublime, magnifique !

C'est le ton du génie et de la vérité.

CYDALISE

J'oublie en le lisant tout ce qu'il m'a coûté.

*Jeune homme prends et lis ! Il est inimitable,*

Et Valère en sera d'une joie incroyable.

M. CARONDAS

D'un doux frémissement vous vous sentez troubler.

*Jeune homme, prends et lis ! L'oracle va parler ;*

La nature à tes yeux ici se manifeste.

Non, rien n'est si sublime, et pourtant si modeste.

CYDALISE

Mais que nous veut Marton ?

## SCÈNE IV

MARTON, CYDALISE, M. CARONDAS

MARTON

Madame, c'est Damis,  
Qui demande à vous voir.

CYDALISE

Que son temps est mal pris !  
J'allais finir sans lui. L'importun personnage !  
On ne me permet pas d'achever un ouvrage.

MARTON

Valère achèvera.

M. CARONDAS

Qu'appellez-vous finir ?  
L'ouvrage est fait, madame, à n'y plus revenir.  
Je le donne en dix ans à nos plus grands génies.

CYDALISE

Oui, vous avez raison. Faites-en vingt copies.  
Ah ! je respire enfin, et j'ai su m'en tirer.  
*Jeune homme, prends et lis.* Oui, Damis peut entrer.

## SCÈNE V

DAMIS, CYDALISE

CYDALISE

Vous voilà de retour ?

DAMIS

Oui, je reviens, madame,  
Pour me plaindre de vous et vous ouvrir mon âme.  
Je n'aperçois que trop, et c'est avec douleur,  
Que j'ai perdu mes droits au fond de votre cœur,  
Et que votre amitié s'est enfin ralentie ;  
Mais la mienne jamais ne s'étant démentie,  
Souffrez que je rappelle à votre souvenir  
Un espoir que le temps ne dut pas en bannir.  
Vous savez à quel point votre fille m'est chère ;  
C'est votre aveu, du moins, c'est celui de son père,  
Qu'en faveur de mes feux je réclame aujourd'hui,  
Puisqu'enfin près de vous j'ai besoin d'un appui.

CYDALISE

Le titre, je l'avoue, est assez légitime ;  
Je conviens de mes torts, non pas que mon estime,  
Ni que cette amitié qui m'attachait à vous,  
Ne soient encor pour moi des sentiments bien doux,  
Et c'est ce que d'abord on aurait dû vous dire :  
Mais j'ai formé des nœuds dont le charme m'attire,  
J'ai suivi trop longtemps les frivoles erreurs  
D'un monde que j'aimais. L'âge a changé mes mœurs,  
Aujourd'hui toute entière à la philosophie,  
Libre des préjugés qui corrompaient ma vie,  
N'existant plus enfin que pour la vérité,

Je me suis fait, Damis, une société,  
Peu nombreuse, il est vrai : je vis avec des sages,  
Et j'apprends à penser en lisant leurs ouvrages.<sup>63</sup>  
J'ai choisi l'un d'entre eux pour ma fille, et ce soir,  
Cette heureuse union doit combler mon espoir,  
C'est à vous de juger si, quoique votre amie,  
Je dois vous immoler le bonheur de ma vie.

DAMIS

Non, pour votre bonheur je donnerais mes jours,  
Et la même amitié m'inspirera toujours.  
Mais quels sont donc enfin ces rares avantages  
Attachés, dites-vous, au commerce des sages ?  
Je ne prends point pour tels un tas de charlatans,  
Qu'on voit sur des tréteaux amener les passants,  
Qui mettent une enseigne à leur philosophie :  
De tous ces importants ma raison se défie.  
De ce vain appareil le vulgaire est séduit.  
Moi, je suis de ces gens qui font peu cas du bruit,  
Et je distingue fort l'ami de la sagesse,  
Du pédant qui s'enroue à la prêcher sans cesse.<sup>64</sup>

CYDALISE

Je sais tout le mépris que l'on doit aux pédants,  
Et ne les confonds pas avec les vrais savants.  
Épargnez-vous, monsieur, cette satire amère,  
Ceux que je peux nommer, Théophraste, Valère,  
Dortidius enfin, sont tous assez connus...

DAMIS

Je ne connais entr'eux que ce Dortidius.  
Quoi ! Madame, il en est ?

CYDALISE

D'où vient cette surprise ?

DAMIS

Je l'ai connu, vous dis-je ; excusez ma franchise :  
Apparemment qu'alors il cachait bien son jeu ;  
Mais ce n'était qu'un sot, presque de son aveu.  
Quelqu'un me le fit voir, et malgré sa grimace,  
Et les plats compliments qu'il vous adresse en face,  
Et le sucre apprêté de ses propos mielleux,  
Je ne lui trouvai rien de si miraculeux.  
Malgré son ton capable, et son air hypocrite,  
Je ne fus point tenté de croire à son mérite,  
Et je ne vis en lui pour le peindre en deux mots,  
Qu'un froid enthousiasme imposant pour les sots.

CYDALISE

Ce jugement fait tort à votre intelligence,  
Et ce Dortidius fait honneur à la France ;  
Son nom chez les savants fut toujours en crédit,  
Et je ne sais pourquoi tout le monde en médit.  
Mais quittons ce propos. Ces rares avantages,  
Dont je suis redevable au commerce des sages,  
Je dois vous en parler et leur en faire honneur.  
Peut-être, après cela, leur tiendrez vous rigueur.  
N'importe, il faut du moins apprendre à les connaître.  
J'avais des préjugés qui dégradaient mon être ;  
Vainement ma raison voulait s'en dégager,  
L'habitude bientôt venait m'y replonger.  
Les plus vaines terreurs me déclaraient la guerre,  
Je croyais aux esprits, j'avais peur du tonnerre,  
Je rougis devant vous de ces absurdités,

Mais on nous berce enfin de ces frivolités,  
Et leur impression n'en est que plus durable.  
Notre éducation, frivole, méprisable,  
Loin de nous éclairer sur le vrai, ni le faux,  
N'est que l'art dangereux de masquer nos défauts.  
Mes yeux se sont ouverts, hélas ! trop tard peut-être !  
À ces hommes divins, je dois un nouvel être.  
Le hasard présidait à mes attachements,  
J'étais aux petits soins avec tous mes parents,  
Et les degrés entre eux réglaient les préférences.  
Cet ordre s'étendait jusqu'à mes connaissances.  
J'avais tous ces travers, beaucoup d'autres encor ;  
Enfin mes sentiments ont pris un autre essor.  
Mon esprit épuré par la philosophie  
Vit l'univers en grand, l'adopta pour patrie,  
Et mettant à profit ma sensibilité,  
Je ne m'attendris plus que sur l'humanité.

DAMIS

Je ne sais, mais enfin dussé-je vous déplaire,  
Ce mot d'*humanité* ne m'en impose guère,  
Et par tant de fripons je l'entends répéter,  
Que je les crois d'accord pour le faire adopter.<sup>65</sup>  
Ils ont quelque intérêt à le mettre à la mode.  
C'est un voile à la fois honorable et commode,  
Qui de leurs sentiments masque la nullité,  
Et prête un beau dehors à leur aridité.  
J'ai peu vu de ces gens qui le prônent sans cesse,  
Pour les infortunés avoir plus de tendresse,  
Se montrer, au besoin, des amis, plus fervents,  
Être plus généreux, ou plus compatissants,  
Attacher aux bienfaits un peu moins d'importance,

Pour les défauts d'autrui marquer plus d'indulgence,  
Consoler le mérite, en chercher les moyens,  
Devenir, en un mot, de meilleurs citoyens ;  
Et pour en parler vrai, ma foi, je les soupçonne  
D'aimer le genre humain, mais pour n'aimer personne.

CYDALISE

Vous en voulez beaucoup à cette humanité.

DAMIS

On en abuse trop, et j'en suis révolté.  
C'est pour le cœur de l'homme un sentiment trop vaste,  
Et j'ai vu quelquefois, par un plaisant contraste,  
De ce système outré les plus chauds partisans,  
Chérir tout l'univers, excepté leurs enfants.<sup>66</sup>

CYDALISE

En vérité, monsieur, les sages sont à plaindre,  
Et vous êtes pour eux un adversaire à craindre.  
Le siècle et la patrie ont beau s'en applaudir,  
Sur le bien qu'ils ont fait il vaut mieux s'étourdir,  
Et servir d'interprète et d'organe à l'envie.

DAMIS

Hé ! Quel bien a produit cette philosophie ?  
Je ne découvre pas ces succès éclatants.  
Je vois autour de moi de petits importants,  
Qui, pour avoir un ton, enrôlés dans la secte,  
Pensent avoir perdu leur qualité d'insecte.  
Se croyant une cour et des admirateurs,  
Pour le malheur des arts, devenus protecteurs  
Ne se réveillant pas aux traits de la satire,  
Et ne devinant rien à ces éclats de rire,



Dont en tous lieux pourtant on les voit poursuivis ;  
Louant, admirant tout dans les autres pays,  
Et se faisant honneur d'avilir leur patrie,<sup>67</sup>  
Sont-ce là les succès sur lesquels on s'écrie ?

CYDALISE

J'admire vos raisons, elles sont d'un grand poids ;  
Et vous me citez-là des exemples de choix,  
Bien dignes en effet d'appuyer votre cause.  
Mais un abus jamais prouva-t-il quelque chose ?  
Faudrait-il renoncer pour quelques importuns ? ...

DAMIS

Madame, ces abus deviennent trop communs.  
J'en prévois pour les mœurs d'étranges catastrophes,  
Et je suis alarmé de tant de philosophes.

CYDALISE

Restez, monsieur, restez dans votre opinion.  
Il n'est point de remède à la prévention ;  
À penser autrement vous auriez du scrupule,  
Hé ! que peut la raison sur un esprit crédule !

DAMIS

On croit avoir tout dit, madame, avec ce mot.  
*Crédule* est devenu l'équivalent de *sot* :  
Aux yeux de bien des gens, du moins la chose est claire.  
Pour moi, que ces gens-là ne persuadent guère,  
Et que leur ton railleur n'épouvanta jamais,  
J'ai mon avis, madame, et si je leur déplais,  
J'en gémis, mais sur eux. Je crois ce qu'il faut croire ;  
J'ose le déclarer, je le dois, j'en fais gloire.<sup>68</sup>  
Ces messieurs peuvent rire, et sans m'humilier :

Il faut bien leur laisser le droit de s'égayer.  
Mais moi, j'ose à mon tour les trouver ridicules,  
Et souvent la bêtise a fait des incrédules.<sup>69</sup>

CYDALISE

Voilà parler en sage, et je vous applaudis ;  
C'est très bien fait à vous que d'avoir un avis.  
Mais, sans nous égarer dans ces hautes matières,  
Je sais ce que je dois aux talents, aux lumières,  
De ces hommes de bien que vous persécutez.

DAMIS

Ils vous ont donc appris de grandes vérités.  
Je ne le croyais pas. Ils ont l'art de détruire,  
Mais ils n'élèvent rien, et ce n'est pas instruire.  
Quel fruit attendez-vous de leurs vains arguments ?  
Je n'en prévois que trop les effets affligeants.  
Vous irez sur leurs pas de sophisme en sophisme,  
Vous perdre dans la nuit d'un triste pyrrhonisme.  
Ah ! renoncez, madame, à ces perturbateurs ;  
Ce sont eux que l'on doit nommer persécuteurs.  
Abjurez une erreur qui vous est étrangère,  
Et reprenez enfin votre vrai caractère.

CYDALISE

Vous avez donc tout dit ? J'admire le bon sens,  
Et la solidité de vos raisonnements.  
Dans un très haut éclat votre mérite y brille ;  
Mais j'ai pris mon parti. Vous n'aurez point ma fille.  
Adieu, monsieur.

*(Elle sort.)*

DAMIS

Ah ! ciel ! je ne sais où j'en suis !

## SCÈNE VI

CRISPIN, DAMIS

CRISPIN

Hé ! Bien, cette démarche a-t-elle eu d'heureux fruits ?  
Épousons-nous, monsieur ? Cydalise, sans doute...

DAMIS

Je viens de lui parler, Crispin : mais qu'il m'en coûte !  
Il me faut renoncer à cet hymen.

CRISPIN

Comment ?

DAMIS

Je suis congédié.

CRISPIN

Quoi ! là... formellement ?

DAMIS

Formellement, Crispin.

CRISPIN

Comment ! nous savons plaire,  
Monsieur, et nous serions éconduits par Valère !  
N'est-il point de remède ?

DAMIS

Oh ! je n'en vois aucun.

CRISPIN

Bon ! Vous n'y pensez pas : moi, j'en vois cent pour un.  
Il faut tout simplement enlever Rosalie.  
C'est le plus court.

DAMIS

Crispin, quel excès de folie !  
Crois-tu qu'elle y consente, et la connais-tu bien,  
Pour me parler ainsi ?

CRISPIN

Je goûtais ce moyen ;  
Mais puisqu'il vous déplaît, il faut dans cette affaire  
Recourir au plus sûr. J'irais trouver Valère,  
Et je voudrais, morbleu, lui parler sur un ton  
À lui faire ce soir désertier la maison.

DAMIS

Ce serait en effet le parti le plus sage ;  
Mais Cydalise.

CRISPIN

Hé bien ?

DAMIS

N'y verra qu'un outrage,  
Et c'est précisément le moyen de l'aigrir,  
Le secret de me perdre, à n'en plus revenir.

CRISPIN

Allons, c'est donc à moi par une heureuse audace,  
D'éclairer Cydalise, et de donner la chasse  
À tous ces discoureurs qui lui gâtent l'esprit.  
Auprès d'elle, à mon tour, j'aurai quelque crédit,  
Et pour peu que Marton seconde l'entreprise,  
À la raison bientôt vous la verrez soumise.

DAMIS, *avec joie d'abord.*

Ah ! Crispin... mais comment s'en reposer sur toi ?

CRISPIN, *avec emphase.*

Je veux qu'elle balance entre Valère et moi.

Vous ne connaissez pas encor tout mon mérite ;

Vous voyez le Strabon d'un nouveau Démocrite.<sup>70</sup>

DAMIS

Toi ?

CRISPIN

Moi-même, monsieur ; j'ai fait plus d'un métier :

Un sage à ses travaux daigna m'associer ;<sup>71</sup>

Et quelque jour mon nom eût été sur la liste,<sup>72</sup>

Du moins il m'en flattait, quand j'étais son copiste.

DAMIS

Comment ?

CRISPIN

J'avais déjà quelques admirateurs ;

Ah ! qu'il m'a fait de tort en fuyant les honneurs,

Pour vivre dans les bois ! je lui dois la justice

Qu'il ne connut jamais la brigue, l'artifice.

De sa philosophie il était entêté,

Au fond plein de droiture et de sincérité.

Animal à la fois misanthrope et cynique,

C'était vraiment un fou dans son espèce unique.

DAMIS

Ah ! puis-je t'écouter dans le trouble où je suis ?

SCÈNE VII

MARTON, DAMIS, CRISPIN

MARTON

Allons, monsieur, il faut éclaircir ces ennuis ;  
Vite, de la gaieté.

DAMIS

Comment ! que veux-tu dire ?

MARTON

Il faut d'abord, monsieur, commencer par en rire.

CRISPIN

Oui, rions, c'est bien dit.

DAMIS

Je suis au désespoir.

MARTON

Bon ! vous n'y pensez pas, et vous voyez trop noir.

CRISPIN

Mais je crois qu'en effet elle a quelque vertige.

MARTON

Consolez-vous.

DAMIS

Marton...

MARTON

Consolez-vous, vous dis-je.

DAMIS

Qu'est-il donc arrivé ?

MARTON

Vous l'apprendrez ; venez.

Oui, je vous mets au rang de amants fortunés.

## ACTE III

### SCÈNE I

DAMIS, MARTON, CRISPIN

DAMIS

Je ne peux revenir encor de ma surprise !  
C'est donc ainsi, Marton, qu'ils trompaient Cydalise ?

MARTON

J'espère qu'à la fin elle entendra raison.

DAMIS

Oh ! Je n'en doute plus, ce billet est trop bon !  
Que ne te dois-je pas pour cette découverte ?

MARTON

L'heureux hasard, monsieur, que cette porte ouverte !  
Ma foi, je le guettais, et depuis fort longtemps ;  
J'avais toujours bien dit qu'il était de leurs gens.  
Je l'aurais affirmé.

CRISPIN

C'est Frontin qu'il se nomme :  
À ce nom-là d'abord j'aurais reconnu l'homme.

MARTON

Mais qui se chargera de rendre cet écrit ?

DAMIS

Toi.

MARTON

Moi ? je me perdrais, monsieur, dans son esprit.  
Je n'oserai jamais.



DAMIS

Marton...

MARTON

À ma maîtresse,

Un billet de ce style ! oh ! non : point de faiblesse,

Il m'en coûterait trop.

DAMIS

Mais...

MARTON

Propos superflus ;

Je ne le ferai pas.

DAMIS

Ni moi.

CRISPIN

Ni moi non plus.

MARTON

C'est que d'ailleurs il faut le rendre en leur présence,

Ou nous ne tenons rien.

DAMIS

Certainement.

CRISPIN

Silence.

Cydalise, je crois, ne m'a jamais vu ?

MARTON

Non.

CRISPIN

Et je suis inconnu dans toute la maison ?

MARTON

Oui.

CRISPIN

Je veux à la fois m'introduire et lui plaire.  
Donnez-moi ce billet, je prends sur moi l'affaire.  
Allez, monsieur, allez, je saurai vous servir.

MARTON

Mais vraiment, j'entrevois qu'il pourra réussir.

CRISPIN

Je ne veux que Marton pour prix de mes services.  
Que n'oserai-je pas sous de pareils auspices ?

MARTON

On vient, c'est l'assemblée, éloignez-vous tous deux.

DAMIS

Je me fie à tes soins du succès de mes vœux.

MARTON

Hé ! vite, éloignez-vous, de craint de surprise.

## SCÈNE II

MARTON, LES PHILOSOPHES

MARTON, *leur faisant une profonde révérence.*

Je vais vous annoncer, messieurs, à Cydalise.

SCÈNE III

THÉOPHRASTE, VALÈRE, DORTIDIUS

THÉOPHRASTE, à Valère.

Hé bien, le mariage est enfin décidé ?

VALÈRE

Oui, j'épouse ce soir. Le notaire est mandé.

DORTIDIUS

Parbleu, j'en suis ravi.

THÉOPHRASTE

Que je t'en félicite !

DORTIDIUS

Ma foi, cette fortune est due à ton mérite.

THÉOPHRASTE

Oui, malgré le dépit de tous les envieux.

DORTIDIUS

Dans le fond, tu pouvais espérer beaucoup mieux.

VALÈRE

Messieurs !

DORTIDIUS

Non je le pense, et c'est sans flatterie.

VALÈRE

Vous voulez...

DORTIDIUS

Nous savons honorer ton génie.

VALÈRE

Ah! tu me rends confus avec ces compliments.

DORTIDIUS

Mais c'est la vérité.

VALÈRE

Si j'avais tes talents,

Si je réunissais tes qualités sublimes,

Ces éloges alors deviendraient légitimes.

THÉOPHRASTE

Et la future enfin consent donc ?

VALÈRE

À regret ;

Mais que me fait à moi son déplaisir secret ?

THÉOPHRASTE

Sans doute, avec le temps tu la rendras docile.

DORTIDIUS

Il faut que Rosalie ait le goût difficile.

VALÈRE

Je ne sais quel rival me dispute son cœur ;

Mais Cydalise au fond n'en a que plus d'ardeur.

DORTIDIUS, *en riant*.

Cydalise... Conviens que la dupe est bien bonne.

VALÈRE

Que mon hymen s'achève, et je te l'abandonne.

Je mourais, si l'affaire eût traîné plus longtemps,

Et jamais à ce point on n'excéda les gens.

DORTIDIUS

Mon, ton hymen conclu, d'honneur, je me retire.

THÉOPHRASTE

Ma foi, je quitte aussi ; le moyen d'y suffire !

(À Valère)

Toi du moins, tu pouvais, animé par l'espoir,

Te faire une raison, t'ennuyer par devoir,

Et l'amour...

VALÈRE, *riant*.

Oui, l'amour ! c'est bien ce qui me tente !

DORTIDIUS

Il épouse parbleu dix mille écus de rente.

VALÈRE, à *Théophraste*.

Quoi donc ! me trouves-tu le ton d'un amoureux ?

Ce serait à mon âge un ridicule affreux.

On revient aujourd'hui de cette erreur commune,

Et l'on songe au plaisir, mais après la fortune.

THÉOPHRASTE

Il a vraiment raison.

DORTIDIUS

Je pense comme lui.

VALÈRE

Aurais-je sans cela pu supporter l'ennui

Qui m'obsédait sans cesse auprès de cette folle ?

Eût-elle été Venus, j'aurais quitté l'idole.

Oh ! je ne donne pas dans de pareils travers.

THÉOPHRASTE

On devrait l'avertir de réformer ses airs ;

Elle était autrefois moins difficile à vivre,  
D'où vient qu'elle a changé ?

VALÈRE

Mais c'est depuis son livre.

THÉOPHRASTE

Quoi ! sérieusement le fait-elle imprimer ?

VALÈRE

Oui.

THÉOPHRASTE

Si l'on n'y met ordre, il faudra l'enfermer.

DORTIDIUS

Sais-tu bien qu'au besoin ce trait pourrait suffire,  
Si tu pensais jamais à la faire interdire.

THÉOPHRASTE

Connais-tu son discours sur *les devoirs des rois* ?

VALÈRE

Ah ! ne m'en parle pas, je l'ai relu vingt fois ;  
Il fallait, à toute heure, essayer cet orage.

DORTIDIUS, *sérieusement.*

Entre nous, cependant, c'est son meilleur ouvrage.  
Le crois-tu de sa main ?

VALÈRE

Bon ! tu veux plaisanter.

DORTIDIUS, *toujours sérieusement.*

Non, d'honneur ; il me plaît.

VALÈRE

Et tu peux t'en vanter !

DORTIDIUS

Je te dis qu'il est bien ; mais très bien.

VALÈRE

Tu veux rire.

C'est une absurdité qui va jusqu'au délire.

DORTIDIUS

Si j'en pensais ainsi, je le dirais très bas.

VALÈRE

Va, ton air sérieux ne m'en impose pas.

DORTIDIUS, *fâché*.

Enfin, monsieur décide, et chacun doit se taire.

VALÈRE

Mais au ton que tu prends, je t'en croirais le père.

DORTIDIUS

Hé bien, s'il était vrai...

VALÈRE

Ma foi, tant pis pour toi.

DORTIDIUS, *plus fâché*.

Mais, mon petit monsieur.

VALÈRE

Je suis de bonne foi.

DORTIDIUS

Je pourrais en venir à des vérités dures.

VALÈRE

Toujours, quand on a tort, on en vient aux injures.

DORTIDIUS

Vous me poussez au bout!<sup>73</sup>



VALÈRE

Et j'en ris, qui plus est.

DORTIDIUS, *furieux*.

Ah ! c'en est trop enfin.

THÉOPHRASTE

Hé ! messieurs, s'il vous plaît...

DORTIDIUS

Plaisant original, pour me rompre en visière !

THÉOPHRASTE, *se mettant entre eux*.

Messieurs, n'imitons pas les pédants de Molière.<sup>74</sup>

Permettez-moi tous deux de vous mettre d'accord.

VALÈRE

Moi, j'ai raison.

THÉOPHRASTE, *à Valère*.

Sans doute.

DORTIDIUS

Et moi, je n'ai pas tort.

THÉOPHRASTE, *à Dortidius*.

Vraiment non. Mais enfin on pourrait vous entendre,

Et déjà Cydalise aurait pu nous surprendre.

DORTIDIUS

L'estime qui toujours devrait nous animer...

THÉOPHRASTE

Il n'est pas question, messieurs, de s'estimer ;

Nous nous connaissons tous : mais du moins la prudence

Veut que de l'amitié nous gardions l'apparence.

C'est par ces beaux dehors que nous en imposons,

Et nous sommes perdus, si nous nous divisons.<sup>75</sup>

Il faut bien se passer certaines bagatelles.

Tenez, on vient à nous. Oubliez vos querelles.

## SCÈNE IV

LES PHILOSOPHES, CYDALISE

CYDALISE, *un livre à la main.*

Pardon, si j'ai tardé ; je m'occupais de vous,  
Et ce sont là toujours mes moments les plus doux.  
Asseyons-nous, messieurs : ah ! vous voilà, Valère !  
On vient de m'apporter le projet du notaire,  
Vous en serez content.

VALÈRE

Le plus cher de mes vœux,  
Vous le savez, madame, en formant ces beaux nœuds,  
C'est d'affermir encor l'amitié qui nous lie.

CYDALISE

Je vous dois le bonheur répandu sur ma vie,  
Je m'acquitte envers vous. Mais, messieurs, à l'instant  
Vous parliez avec feu. Quel sujet important  
Pouvait vous diviser ? J'ai cru du moins entendre  
Que l'on se disputait.

VALÈRE, *avec un peu d'embarras.*

Il est vrai.

CYDALISE

Puis-je apprendre  
Sur quoi vous dissertiez avec tant d'intérêt ?

VALÈRE

Puisqu'il faut l'avouer, vous en étiez l'objet.

CYDALISE

Moi ?

VALÈRE

Vous. Cette chaleur en est le témoignage.

CYDALISE

Quoi donc ?

VALÈRE

Ah ! je ne puis en dire davantage.

Je ne sais point louer en présence des gens.

Parlez, messieurs, parlez.

THÉOPHRASTE

Tu permets ?

VALÈRE

J'y consens.

THÉOPHRASTE

Dans les siècles passés on cherchait un génie

Qu'on pût vous comparer. Je citais Aspasia,<sup>76</sup>

Et monsieur se fâchait de la comparaison.

VALÈRE

Je la trouve choquante, et voici ma raison.

Aspasia autrefois put briller dans Athènes ;

Mais la philosophie y fleurissait à peine.

Tous les peuples frappés de son éclat nouveau,

Durent se prosterner autour de son berceau ;

Tout fut surprise alors. Des talents ordinaires

Brillaient à peu de frais, dans ces siècles vulgaires,

Mais de nos jours l'esprit a fait tant de progrès ;

Il est si difficile, après tant de succès,

De se mettre au niveau de ces hommes célèbres,

Par qui la barbarie a vu fuir ses ténèbres,

Que je ne puis souffrir, sans me mettre en courroux,

Que l'on balance encore entre Aspasia et vous.

(À Théophraste)

Comparez donc les temps, et voyez où vous êtes.

THÉOPHRASTE

Mais les comparaisons ne sont jamais parfaites.

VALÈRE

Allons, vous aviez tort.

THÉOPHRASTE

Je le sens, j'en rougis.

CYDALISE

N'allez pas là-dessus demander mon avis ;

Je sais trop...

VALÈRE, *avec un ton de sentiment.*

Nous savons que vous êtes sublime.

DORTIDIUS

Ce sont nos sentiments ; mais comme il les exprime !

Il sait tout embellir !

CYDALISE, *vivement.*

Ah ! c'est la vérité.

VALÈRE, *lui baisant la main.*

Vous me pardonnez donc cette vivacité ?

CYDALISE

Je devrais le gronder, son esprit me désarme ;

On ne peut y tenir, *et je suis sous le charme.*<sup>77</sup>

DORTIDIUS

Personne ne sait mieux se rendre intéressant.

VALÈRE

Je vois que le génie est toujours indulgent.

CYDALISE

Monsieur Dortidius, dit-on quelques nouvelles ?

DORTIDIUS

Je ne m'occupe point des rois, de leurs querelles :

Que me fait le succès d'un siège ou d'un combat ?

Je laisse à nos oisifs ces affaires d'État.

Je m'embarrasse peu du pays que j'habite,

Le véritable sage est un cosmopolite.

CYDALISE

On tient à la patrie, et c'est le seul lien...

DORTIDIUS

Fi donc ! c'est se borner que d'être citoyen.

Loin de ces grands revers qui désolent le monde,

Le sage vit chez lui dans une paix profonde ;

Il détourne les yeux de ces objets d'horreur ;

Il est son seul monarque et son législateur ;

Rien ne peut altérer le bonheur de son être :

C'est aux grands à calmer les troubles qu'ils font naître.

THÉOPHRASTE

Il voit en philosophe, et c'est voir comme il faut.

CYDALISE

On ne trouve jamais son esprit en défaut.

VALÈRE

Madame, il a raison. L'esprit philosophique

Ne doit point déroger jusqu'à la politique.

Ces guerres, ces traités, tous ces riens importants,

S'enfoncent par degrés dans l'abîme des temps.  
Tout cela disparaît au flambeau du génie,  
Et si l'on peut parler sans fausse modestie,  
Excepté vous, et nous, je ne découvre rien  
Qui puisse être l'objet d'un honnête entretien.<sup>78</sup>

CYDALISE

Oui, véritablement, ce sont là des misères.

THÉOPHRASTE

Qu'il faut abandonner à des esprits vulgaires.

CYDALISE

Je n'appellerai pas de votre autorité.  
À propos, parle-t-on de quelque nouveauté ?

VALÈRE

Nous n'en protégeons qu'une.

CYDALISE

Un chef-d'œuvre, sans doute ?

VALÈRE

C'est une découverte, une nouvelle route,  
Que l'un de nous, madame, entreprend de trace,  
Un genre où le génie a de quoi s'exercer.

CYDALISE

Une tragédie ?

VALÈRE

Oui, purement domestique.<sup>79</sup>

Comme nous les voulons.

CYDALISE

Je craindrais la critique ;

Contre les nouveautés elle a toujours raison ;  
Et le public...

VALÈRE

Vraiment, il décide en oison ;  
Nous savons bien cela : mais nous ferons la guerre.

CYDALISE

Je ne sais, le vieux goût tient encore au parterre.

VALÈRE

Nous risquons, il est vrai, surtout les premiers jours ;  
Mais nous ferons un bruit à rendre les gens sourds.  
Nous avons des amis, qui de loges en loges,  
Vont crier au miracle, et forcer les éloges ;  
N'avons-nous pas d'ailleurs le succès des soupers ?

CYDALISE

Oui, je n'y songeais pas, et vous me détrompez.

VALÈRE

Nous avons tant de gens qui pour nous se dévouent  
Tant de petits auteurs qui par orgueil nous louent  
Que je suis assuré qu'avec un peu d'encens,  
Nous leur ferions à tous abjurer le bon sens.

THÉOPHRASTE

Ha, ha, ha, ha, ha, ha, c'est la vérité pure.

VALÈRE

Mais non, sans plaisanter, j'en ferais la gageure.

CYDALISE

Et ce chef-d'œuvre enfin l'attendrons-nous longtemps ?

VALÈRE

Nous sommes occupés de soins plus importants.



CYDALISE

Quoi donc ?

VALÈRE

Certain auteur dans une comédie

Veut, dit-on, nous jouer.

CYDALISE

L'entreprise est hardie.

DORTIDIUS, *avec feu.*

Nous jouer ! Mais vraiment, c'est un crime d'État ;

Nous jouer !

VALÈRE

Nous saurons parer cet attentat.

CYDALISE

Ah ! le public entier...

DORTIDIUS

Nous pourrions nous méprendre,

Nous l'avons malmené : s'il allait nous le rendre ?

CYDALISE

Ah ! tous les magistrats élèveraient la voix.

THÉOPHRASTE

Nous nous sommes brouillés avec ces gens de lois.

CYDALISE

Mais la Cour...

VALÈRE

Ne prendra jamais notre querelle ;

Nous en avons agi lestement avec elle.

DORTIDIUS

Vous verrez qu'il faudra dire un mot à l'auteur.

THÉOPHRASTE

Oui, du moins on pourrait essayer s'il a peur.

VALÈRE

Le pis aller, messieurs, c'est d'attendre l'orage,

Jusque-là, diffamons et l'auteur et l'ouvrage ;

Armons la main des sots pour nous venger de lui ;

Portons des coups plus sûrs en nous servant d'autrui.

Ne peut-on pas gagner des acteurs, des actrices ?

Nous aurons un parti jusques dans les coulisses.<sup>80</sup>

Il faut de la cabale exciter les rumeurs,

Nous montrer, même en loge, aux yeux des spectateurs.

Je connais le public, nous n'avons qu'à paraître :

Il nous craint.

CYDALISE

C'est bien dit : qui le brave est son maître.

Mais notre colporteur tarde bien à venir.

Il devrait être ici : qui peut le retenir ?

DORTIDIUS

Peut-être qu'il attend.

CYDALISE

Il faut qu'on l'avertisse.

THÉOPHRASTE

Le voici justement.

SCÈNE V<sup>81</sup>

UN LAQUAIS, CYDALISE, LES PHILOSOPHES

LAQUAIS

Madame?

CYDALISE

Il n'est venu personne

Pour des livres ?

LAQUAIS

Personne.

CYDALISE, *avec un mouvement d'inquiétude.*

Un ordre clandestin

L'aurait-il fait saisir ? ... Appelez Valentin.

LAQUAIS

Madame, il est fort mal, et l'on craint pour sa vie.

DORTIDIUS

Tant mieux ! c'est un sujet pour notre anatomie.

CYDALISE

Mais est-il donc si mal ?

LAQUAIS

Il est désespéré,

Madame, et je le tiens pour un homme enterré.

DORTIDIUS

Le pauvre Valentin ! c'est un garçon que j'aime,

Et qu'il me tarde bien de disséquer moi-même.

(*À Cydalise*)

Mais vous deviez, je crois, commencer votre cours,

Madame ; cependant vous différez toujours.

CYDALISE

Ce projet, de ma part, n'était qu'un pur caprice...

LAQUAIS

Voice le colporteur.

*(Il sort.)*

## SCÈNE VI

M. PROPICE, CYDALISE, LES PHILOSOPHES

CYDALISE

Entrez, Monsieur Propice.

Avez-vous du nouveau ?

M. PROPICE

Je ne cours pas après,

Madame. Avez-vous lu les *Bijoux indiscrets* ?

C'est une gaillardise assez philosophique,

Du moins à ce qu'on dit.

CYDALISE

L'idée en est comique ;

Mais cela n'est pas neuf.

M. PROPICE

Cela se vend toujours.

CYDALISE

Passons.

M. PROPICE

Connaissez-vous les *Lettre sur les sourds*?

CYDALISE

L'auteur m'en fit présent.

DORTIDIUS

Tout son mérite y brille.

M. PROPICE

Vous ne voudriez pas du *Père de famille*?<sup>82</sup>

Cela n'est pas trop bon.

DORTIDIUS, *ironiquement*.

Vous vous y connaissez.

M. PROPICE

Mais le public le dit, et je l'en crois assez.  
Pour le livre des *Mœurs*, je me souviens, madame,  
De vous l'avoir vendu.

(Il lit les titres)

*Réflexions sur l'âme?*<sup>83</sup>

CYDALISE

Voyons, Je les connais. Est-ce tout ?

M PROPICE

Vraiment, non.

*L'Interprétation de la nature.*

CYDALISE

Bon,

C'est un livre excellent !

DORTIDIUS

Sublime !

THEOPHRASTE

Nécessaire !

CYDALISE

Je le garde ; quelqu'un m'a pris mon exemplaire.

M. PROPICE

Ceci, c'est le *Discours sur l'inégalité*.<sup>84</sup>

CYDALISE, *le prenant*.

Ah ! je vais le relire avec avidité.

Quel est cet autre écrit... là... que je vois en tête ?

M. PROPICE

Madame, ce n'est rien ; c'est le *Petit Prophète*.<sup>85</sup>

CYDALISE

Ah ! ah ! je m'en souviens ; il est très amusant.

M. PROPICE

Oui, c'est un badinage infiniment plaisant.

N'attendez-vous plus rien de mon petit service ?

CYDALISE

Non. Je retiens ceci, Bonjour, monsieur Propice.

SCÈNE VII

CYDALISE, LES PHILOSOPHES

CYDALISE

Ah ! je relirai donc mon livre favori !

VALÈRE

Quoi, l'*Inégalité*. C'est bien le mien aussi.

THÉOPRASTE

Ce livre est un trésor ; il réduit tous les hommes  
Au rang des animaux, et c'est ce que nous sommes.  
L'homme s'est fait esclave en se donnant des lois,  
Et tout n'irait que mieux s'il vivait dans les bois.

CYDALISE

Pour moi, je goûterais une volupté pure  
À nous voir tous rentrer dans l'état de nature.

THÉOPRASTE

Les esprits dans l'erreur sont encor trop plongés,  
Et l'on est retenu par tant de préjugés... !  
Il est tant de savants qui n'en ont pas l'étoffe... !

CYDALISE

Mais que nous veut Marton ?



## SCÈNE VIII

MARTON, CYDALISE, LES PHILOSOPHES

MARTON

Madame, un philosophe

Demande à vous parler.

CYDALISE

Il se nomme ?

MARTON

Crispin.

CYDALISE

Le nom est singulier.

DORTIDIUS

Oui, parbleu !

CYDALISE

Mais enfin.

Les nomes ne prouvent rien : ah ! ciel ! quelle surprise !

## SCÈNE IX

CRISPIN, CYDALISE, LES PHILOSOPHES, MARTON

CRISPIN, *allant à quatre pattes*.<sup>86</sup>

Madame, elle n'a rien dont je me formalise.

Je ne me règle plus sur les opinions,

Et c'est-là l'heureux fruit de mes réflexions.

Pour la philosophie un goût à qui tout cède,

M'a fait choisir exprès l'état de quadrupède :

Sur ces quatre piliers mon corps se soutient mieux,

Et je vois moins de sots qui me blessent les yeux.

CYDALISE, *à Valère*.

Il est original du moins dans son système.

VALÈRE

Mais il est fort plaisant.

MARTON

Moi, je sens que je l'aime.

CRISPIN

En nous civilisant, nous avons tout perdu,

La santé, le bonheur, et même la vertu.

Je me renferme donc dans la vie animale ;

Vous voyez ma cuisine, elle est simple et frugale.<sup>87</sup>

On ne peut, il est vrai, se contenter à moins ;

Mais j'ai su m'enrichir en perdant des besoins.

La fortune autrefois me paraissait injuste ;

Et je suis devenu plus heureux, plus robuste

Que tous ces courtisans dans le luxe amollis,

Dont les femmes enfin connaissent tout le prix.

Prévenu de l'accueil que vous faites aux sages,

Madame, je venais vous rendre mes hommages,

Inviter ces messieurs, peut-être à m'imiter,  
Du moins si mon exemple a de quoi les tenter.

CYDALISE

Savez-vous qu'on démêle, à travers sa folie,  
De l'esprit ?

DORTIDIUS

Mais beaucoup.

MARTON

Je dirais du génie ;  
Et jamais philosophe à ce point ne m'a plu.

THEOPHRASTE

C'est ce que nous cherchions ; un homme convaincu,  
Qui plein de son système, et bravant la critique,  
Aux spéculations veut joindre la pratique.

CYDALISE

Dans le fond, ce serait un homme à respecter ;  
Mais par les préjugés on se sent arrêter.

CRISPIN

Ma résolution peut vous sembler bizarre.

CYDALISE

Vous donnez, à vrai dire, un exemple bien rare ;  
Mais votre empressement ne peut qu'être flatteur ;  
Vous êtes philosophe, et même à la rigueur.

CRISPIN

Je me suis interdit de consulter les modes,  
J'ai cru que des habits devaient être commodes,  
Et rien de plus. Encor dans un climat bien chaud...

THEOPHRASTE

On juge ici, monsieur, l'homme par ce qu'il vaut,  
Et non par les habits.

CRISPIN

C'est penser en vrai sage.

CYDALISE

Mais qui peut nous venir ?

## SCÈNE X

M. CARONDAS, CYDALISE, LES PHILOSOPHES, CRISPIN, MARTON

M. CARONDAS, *fixant beaucoup Crispin, et marquant de l'embarras.*

J'ai rempli mon message,

Madame... et le notaire... arrive en un moment.

CYDALISE

Qu'avez vous ?

M. CARONDAS, *montrant Crispin, qui se cache un peu derrière Cydalise.*

Quel est donc cet animal plaisant ?

CYDALISE

C'est un grand philosophe, il sera de la fête.

CRISPIN

En vérité... madame...

M. CARONDAS, *à Valère.*

Ah ! la maudite bête !

Nous sommes découverts.

VALÈRE

Hé ! comment ?

M. CARONDAS

C'est Crispin,

Le valet de Damis.

CRISPIN, *se relevant.*

Hé ! oui, monsieur Frontin :

Parlez haut ; oui, c'est lui.

CYDALISE

Quel est donc ce mystère ?

CRISPIN, *en montrant Valère.*

Le valet de monsieur est votre secrétaire,  
Et je me suis servi de ce déguisement,  
Pour remettre en vos mains un billet important,<sup>88</sup>  
(*Montrant M. Carondas*)

Surpris chez ce fripon.

CYDALISE, *ouvrant le billet.*

Je connais l'écriture;

(*À Valère*)

C'est la vôtre, monsieur.

CRISPIN

Lisez, je vous conjure.

VALÈRE, *aux philosophes.*

Ah ! nous sommes perdus !

CYDALISE, *lit haut, mais d'une voix altérée, et qui s'affaiblit peu à peu.*

« Je te renvoie, mon cher Frontin, ce recueil d'impertinences que Cydalise appelle son livre. Continue de flatter cette folle, à qui ton nom savant en impose. Théophraste et Dortidius viennent de me communiquer un projet excellent qui achèvera de lui tourner la tête, et pour le succès duquel tu nous seras nécessaire. Ses ridicules, ses travers, ses... »

CRISPIN

Elle baisse la voix,

Et n'ira pas plus loin, à ce que je prévois.

M. CARONDAS

Ah, traître de Crispin!

DORTIDIUS, *à Valère.*

L'aventure est fâcheuse,

Mais nous y sommes faits.

VALÈRE, *bas*.

Quelle disgrâce affreuse !

Que lui dire ? Sortons.

CYDALISE

Lisez, Monsieur, lisez ;

Et justifiez-vous après, si vous l'osez.

De vos séductions j'étais donc la victime !

Et mes yeux sont ouverts sur le bord de l'abîme !

Que vous avais-je fait pour me traiter ainsi ?

Allez, et de vos jours ne paraissez ici.

Votre confusion suffit à ma vengeance.

Ingrats ; d'autres peut-être auront moins d'indulgence.

C'est le dernier espoir de mon cœur outragé :

Partez.

VALÈRE, *furieux*.

Ah ! malheureux.

M. CARONDAS

Voilà notre congé.

(*Ils sortent.*)

CYDALISE

Les cruels, à quel point ils m'avaient prévenue !

SCÈNE XI et dernière

DAMIS, ROSALIE, CYDALISE, MARTON, CRISPIN

CYDALISE

Venez, Damis, venez, je sens que votre vue  
Me rappelle l'excès de mon aveuglement.

DAMIS

Les voilà démasqués, l'erreur n'a qu'un moment.  
Ils sont assez punis de n'être plus à craindre,  
Et ce n'est plus à vous, madame, de vous plaindre.

CYDALISE

À ces hommes pervers j'avais sacrifié  
Les devoirs les plus saints, et même l'amitié.  
Vous êtes bien vengé ! Ma chère Rosalie,  
Je reconnais mes torts, que ton cœur les oublie ;  
Je les répare tous en te donnant Damis.

DAMIS

Vous trouverez en moi les sentiments d'un fils.

ROSALIE

Tous mes vœux sont remplis, le ciel me rend ma mère.

CRISPIN

Moi, j'épouse Marton, pour terminer l'affaire.

MARTON, *au public*.

Des sages de nos jours nous distinguons les traits :  
Nous démasquons les faux, et respectons les vrais.





# Endnotes

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- 1 When Voltaire republishes this preface in the *Facéties* (see above, Introduction), he adds a number of notes, which are presented here. Notes here are drawn both from Ferret's edition of this preface (pp. 113–19), and my own edition of Voltaire's re-publication, in *Facéties*, pp. 221–44.
- 2 Voltaire writes: 'Alas! Did he have any other views other than the hope of earning a little money?'
- 3 Voltaire writes: 'Where then is this support? What gratitude does he owe the public? Was his play performed again? Will it be performed? Is it read?'
- 4 In his edition, Voltaire adds a Latin epigraph, 'Castigas non turpia turpis', translated as 'Shameful [person], you castigate things that are not shameful', seeming to play on Juvenal's *Satires* II.9–10. See *Juvenal and Persius*, trans. by George Gilbert Ramsay, *Loeb Classical Library* (Cambridge, MA: Loeb, 1969), p. 19.
- 5 The *Encyclopédie*.
- 6 Scepticism: the philosophy of Pyrrho, founded in 4BC.
- 7 Voltaire writes: 'What an insolent denunciation! What anger! What public and atrocious slander! And why? All because Palissot's *Sardanapale* was booed.'  
This refers to *Zarès*, in which the eponymous character is the unrecognized son of Sardanapalus. The implication is that Palissot's critiques come from wounded pride rather than any moral stance.
- 8 Voltaire writes: 'This, then, is a whole part of the nation that Palissot has insulted.'
- 9 Voltaire writes: 'But this original purpose was a licence controlled by laws: *Venere modum formidine fustis*.'  
The quotation, meaning 'Men changed their tune, and terror of the cudgel [led them back to goodly and gracious forms of speech]', is

drawn from Horace (*Satires, Epistles and Ars Poetica*, trans. by H. Rushton Fairclough, *Loeb Classical Library* (Cambridge, MA: Loeb, 1947), p. 409. The implication is that Palissot does not abide by the rules of this 'original purpose' he claims to follow.

- 10 Palissot's note in one of the 1760 editions: 'Helvétius.'
- 11 Voltaire writes: 'At the second performance it was necessary to cut fifty lines that outraged women and citizens with their most revolting brutality.'
- 12 Palissot's note: 'Voltaire.'
- 13 A reference to the 'précieux' salon of the Marquise de Rambouillet, implicitly mocked in Molière's *Les Précieuses ridicules* (1659).
- 14 Charles Cotin (1604–1681) and Gilles Ménage (1613–1692), both members of contemporary academies, and satirized as Trissotin and Valdius in *Les Femmes savantes*.
- 15 Molière's *Tartuffe* (1664) was accused of mocking religious believers; *Le Malade imaginaire* (1673), among many other of his titles, satirized the medical profession.
- 16 A reference to Racine's only comedy, the 1678 *Les Plaideurs*.
- 17 Voltaire writes: 'And it is a minor administrator, known only for being a scoundrel and for *Sardanapale*, who recalls to us these ancient models.'
- 18 Palissot's note: 'These words are taken from the *Dictionnaire encyclopédique*, in the entry for *Encyclopedie*. They were recently cited in a very interesting article in the *Année littéraire*.'

The quotation in fact formed the entire preface to the play in one 1763 edition (in *Théâtre et œuvres diverses*, London and Paris, pp. 172–73). The *Année littéraire* article referred to was a 'Lettre de M. de \*\*\* à M. Fréron sur le mot 'Encyclopédie' du dictionnaire qui porte ce nom', III, pp. 260–62.

Voltaire adds his own note here, reading: 'Reponse. Yes, Palissot, they prove that it is necessary to show strong hatred against baseness and envy, but they do not prove that baseness and envy have any right to slander men of merit for no other reason than that they have scorned you.'

- 19 Voltaire writes: 'There is no question that the truly evil one is the author of several plays that have been booed, who writes a satirical piece to be performed occasionally in favour of satire.'
- 20 Voltaire writes: 'You lie to the public; these words are not in the book that you cite.'

Indeed, instead they are a paraphrase of Boyer d'Argens' *La Philosophie du bon sens*, 3 vols (The Hague, 1768), II, p. 226.

- 21 Voltaire writes: 'You lie to the public; *l'Homme plante* is not by any of the *encyclopédistes* against whom you are raging.'  
The text in question is a 1748 piece by La Mettrie.
- 22 This is the text by La Mettrie known as the *Anti-Sénèque* (1750); see Ferret, p. 117.
- 23 Voltaire writes: 'You lie to the public; *La Vie heureuse* is not by any of the *encyclopédistes*.'
- 24 Ferret notes that the following quotations can be compared to passages in Helvétius' *De l'esprit* (p. 117).
- 25 Voltaire writes: 'You lie, *idem*.'
- 26 Voltaire writes: '*Idem*.'
- 27 Voltaire writes: '*Idem*.'
- 28 Voltaire writes: 'You lie to the public: not a word of this appears in the 'Discours préliminaire.'  
In a letter to the *Observateur littéraire*, Palissot admits he included elements of Rousseau's thought here (in *Facéties*, pp. 336–39). The quotation in question is in fact taken from Jaucourt's article 'Government', vol. VII, p. 789.
- 29 Voltaire writes: 'You lie to the public, for you cut these passages short.'  
Four passages from the same article are presented here dissociated, when in fact they follow more closely. Palissot's fragmented version gives a far stronger impression of the support for civil disobedience than Jaucourt puts forward in the original: Jaucourt condemns the arbitrary seizing of power, but Palissot cuts this element entirely.
- 30 Voltaire writes: '*Idem*.'
- 31 Voltaire writes: '*Idem*.'  
Again, Palissot removes an element of Jaucourt's argument, which supports filial obedience, in order to present the philosophes as anarchic.
- 32 Voltaire writes: 'You lie with inconceivable impudence, there is not a word of what you quote.'  
Indeed, François-Vincent Toussaint's 1749 *Les Mœurs* contradicts the sentiments Palissot attributes to it.

33 Voltaire writes: 'You lie with a punishable artifice. Here are the words of the author. After having shown how important it is to honour ones father and mother, filial love, says he, even the most tender and affectionate, is not such a general obligation that it cannot be susceptible to certain exemptions; a father who shows only hatred can only be loved as much as is necessary to love one's enemies: though a father may have faults in his mood, in his thoughts; these are vain pretexts for ingratitude; fall at his feet, hard and ungrateful heart, embrace his knees.'

34 Voltaire writes: 'You lie more than ever; there is not a word of this in the passage you cite; but the very opposite is found on the final page of the chapter on wisdom; there the author gives these maxims: prefer honesty to utility, put a break on your desires.'

Voltaire's criticism is not quite so easily explained here — in fact, Toussaint does imply that passions should be followed. However, he contextualizes his claims in a later paragraph: Voltaire might have done better to point to this later contradiction.

35 Voltaire writes: 'You lie again, for though La Mettrie's book might be bad, you imply that the author says what in fact he puts in the mouth of a debauched individual.'

On the possible identification of this 'débauché' with Hobbes, see *Facéties*, p. 244, n. 35.

36 Voltaire writes: 'You are right to lay down your pen, but you are most guilty and most punishable for having taken it up in the first place, and at the same time entirely senseless, to have vomited up so many deceptions that it is so easy to confuse.'

37 Cf. the opening of Gresset, *Le Méchant*, I, i: 'Things are going badly, and the marriage is off'.

38 Cf. Molière, *Les Femmes savantes*, I, I: 'And not every mind is cut from the right cloth / To be made into a philosophe.'

39 Cf. Moreau, *Nouveau mémoire pour servir à l'histoire des Cacouacs* (Amsterdam, 1757), p. 9: 'and everyone knows that man is a fickle creature'.

40 A reference to the 'Querelle des bouffons', a dispute about the respective value of French and Italian music. The Italian comic opera troupe, the Buffoni, had visited Paris in 1752–1753, and enjoyed huge success. Supporters of the musical traditions of the French Académie Royale attacked the Italian emphasis on melody and lyrics, whilst those on the side of the Italians critiqued the French focus on harmony, as employed by Jean-Philippe Rameau (1683–1764, whose fictional nephew features in

the Diderot text that responds to Palissot's play, see Introduction). It is implied that Cydalise, said here to spend time with 'buffoons', gave her support to the Italian side of the quarrel; placing her alongside Rousseau, whose *Lettre sur la musique française* claimed that 'the French have no music and are unable to have one' (in *Essai sur l'origine des langues et autres textes* (Paris: Flammarion, 1993), pp. 127–84 (p. 184); my translation).

- 41 Cf. Chrysale's speech in *Les Femmes savantes*, II, vii.
- 42 The original text mentions Homer and Lycophron specifically: the latter was a tragic poet of the 3<sup>rd</sup> century BC, whose *Alexandra* contains a monologue from the eponymous heroine which is full of erudition and intentional obscurity. See also II, iii, below.
- 43 Cf. Clitandre in *Les Femmes savantes*, I, iv: 'Marriage to Henriette is the only prize I crave'.
- 44 Cf. the exchange between Lisette and Chloé in *Le Méchant*, I, vi.
- 45 One of the more explicit references to Molière: *Georges Dandin; or, the Thwarted Husband* (1668) is a comedy-ballet, which tells the story of a rich peasant who marries the daughter of a pair of country nobles, by whom he is mocked for his lack of culture at every turn, all the while being cuckolded by his wife.
- 46 Cf. Palissot's *Petites lettres sur les grands philosophes*: 'They declared that they thought very little of the public; that they no longer wrote for them'.
- 47 Crates of Thebes (365–285 BC) was a philosopher and cynic. Delafarge suggests this is probably a reference to Helvétius' *De l'esprit*, which was condemned by the Parisian Parlement when it appeared in 1758, but whose author was known to be generous and kind (p. 160).
- 48 Cf. Palissot, *Petites lettres*, 'They tried to pull the wool over the eyes of the public, by yoking together the ideas of criticism, satire, personalities, and pamphlets; by dint of complaining about persecution, they became the persecutors, and intolerance, which in all other circumstances is rejected, took its place in the sanctuary of the muses.'
- 49 The comparison between Socrates and the persecuted philosophes is a commonplace of philosophical literature between 1757–1760. It appears in a number of texts produced as part of the quarrel surrounding *Les Philosophes*, including *Un disciple de Socrate, aux Athéniens*, in Ferret, pp. 261–70.
- 50 Summary of the doctrine set out by Helvétius in *De l'esprit*.

- 51 Cf. *Les Qu'est-ce?*, in Ferret, p. 128.
- 52 Socrates (according to the writings of Plato, *Apologia*) claimed to have an inner voice that guided him, which in some sources is referred to as his daemon.
- 53 Gerardus Johannis Vossius, Dutch humanist (1577–1649) or his son Isaacus (1618–1689).
- 54 Casaubon, an erudite French Greek scholar (1559–1614).
- 55 Grotius, a Dutch jurist and diplomat (1583–1645).
- 56 Byzantine jurist, who was involved in the writing of the Code of Justinian in the 6th century AD.
- 57 Thales of Miletus (625–546 BC), mathematician, physicist, astronomer and philosopher, the oldest and most famous of the seven sages. The original line then mentions Anaxagoras (500–428 BC), another Greek philosopher — for the purposes of versification, we chose to replace him in our translation with Democritus (460–370 BC).
- 58 The first direct attack on Diderot. *Le Fils naturel* had already been the target of the second of the *Petites lettres*, published in 1757.
- 59 On Lycophron see above, note 140.
- 60 Here Palissot added a note: 'The start of the useless book, *Considérations sur les mœurs*.'
- This text, by Duclos, had appeared in 1751. The phrase, along with the sentence cited later in the scene, taken from Diderot, had already been attacked in the *Petites lettres*.
- 61 The Suda or Souda is a Byzantine dictionary, composed at the end of the 10th century, which was for a long time attributed to an author known as Soudas.
- 62 Palissot's note here reads 'This is the magnificent opening of the book entitled *L'Interprétation de la nature*.'
- Diderot's *Pensées sur l'interprétation de la nature* appeared in 1753. The cited phrase, which appears at the start of the address 'To those young people who are disposed towards the study of natural philosophy', earned Diderot numerous sarcastic comments (cf. among others the *Nouveau mémoire pour servir à l'histoire des Cacouacs*, p. 27, and *Discours du patriarche des Cacouacs* (Cacopolis: [n. pub.], 1758), p. ix).
- 63 Cf. Philaminte in *Les Femmes savantes*.

- 64 Cf. the *Nouveau mémoire pour servir à l'histoire des Cacouacs*, p. 10: 'Cacouacs who, standing up in public, shouted out at passers-by until they were hoarse'.
- 65 The sarcasm employed regarding the word 'humanity' incited a strong reaction from Voltaire, who wrote to Palissot in June 1760 (D8958): 'I am one of the first to have had frequent recourse to that terrible word 'humanity', against which you make such a strong attack in your play.'
- 66 Although Rousseau was known for having abandoned his children (see *Les Rêveries du promeneur solitaire* (Paris: Flammarion, 1997), pp. 155–56), Delafarge argues this jibe is more likely to refer directly to Cydalise, who has just expressed a preference for humanity over her own daughter, as well as dismissing the memory of her dead husband on purely rational grounds (pp. 155–56).
- 67 The accusation seems to have some weight. In Chapter IV of his *Mémoires*, Morellet recalls the meetings between d'Alembert, Raynal, Helvétius, Galiani, Marmontel, Thomas and others in the Tuileries: 'we often went to the Tuileries [...] to meet other friends, hear the latest news, mock the government, and philosophise at our leisure.' During the Seven Years War, whilst a change of alliances meant that France was allied with Austria and thus at war with Prussia, the sympathies of the philosophes' 'circle' nonetheless remained with Frederick II of Prussia: 'We took a close interest in the success of the King of Prussia, distraught when he had suffered some loss, and delighted when he had beaten the Austrian forces. We were indignant at this banding together of the European powers against a King who was known to us as a philosopher, and who was indeed much more favourable than any of his contemporaries to the establishment of truths that we regarded as useful, and that we made every attempt to broadcast to the world.' (*Mémoires sur le dix-huitième siècle et sur la révolution* (Paris: Petit, 1818), p. 97).
- 68 Here Palissot opposes what must be believed (religion, dogma, tradition) to the purported new truths of the philosophes.
- 69 Palissot uses one of Diderot's own *Pensées philosophiques* against him: 'Incredulity is sometimes the vice of an idiot.' (No. 32).
- 70 Allusion to Regnard's comedy *Démocrite*, performed at the Comédie-Française in 1700: Strabo is the name of the comic valet who accompanies the Greek philosopher of the title.



- 71 The original French 'copiste' alludes to Rousseau, who was well-known for having taken on the job of copying music in order to earn a living (*Confessions*, p. 440).
- 72 An allusion to the pensions enjoyed by men of letters: Rousseau reports in the *Confessions* (pp. 445–50) that he could have received one for his *Devin du Village*. See also *Les Qu'est-ce?*, in Ferret, p. 126.
- 73 At this point in the original, Dortidius switches from using the informal 'tu' to the more formal 'vous', signaling a breaking apart of the intimacy.
- 74 In *Les Femmes savantes*, Vadius and Trissotin argue in the presence of Philaminte (III, iii). Another argument between pedants is found in *L'Amour médecin* (II, iv and III, i).
- 75 Cf. *Les Qu'est-ce?*, in Ferret, p. 128.
- 76 Greek woman from Miletus, the lover and subsequently the wife of Pericles, famous for her beauty and wit. Her private life and her influence on politics were mocked in ancient Greek comedy.
- 77 Palissot notes that the French here ('je suis sous le charme') is drawn from *Le Fils naturel*. In fact, the line he cites ('Je m'écria, presque sans le vouloir, il est sous le charme.'), is drawn from the second of the *Entretiens sur le fils naturel*, printed following the original edition of the play. See also the *Nouveau mémoire pour servir à l'histoire des Cacouacs*, p. 68.
- 78 Cf. *Le Méchant*, II, iii: 'And the art of enjoying the world lies in mocking all who are in it. / My faith, when I examine all that compose it / I find no-one but us that is worth anything.'
- 79 Palissot notes: 'See the *Entretiens* following the *Fils naturel*.'
- 80 Allusion to the resistance of Clairon, who tried — in vain — to prevent *Les Philosophes* from being received by the Comédie-Française. See Introduction.
- 81 This scene may have been deliberately suppressed in the printed text, but was performed in 1760. See Baring, pp. xxvii–xxviii, and Introduction.
- 82 Palissot's note in the 1788 edition reads: 'Diderot, author of the *Bijoux indiscrets*, a most obscene book, of the *Lettre sur les sourds*, of *L'Interpretation de la nature*, and of several other works of an often unintelligible metaphysics, desired to add to his reputation as philosophe that of dramatic author. He had performed *Le Fils naturel*, which was unfinished, and *Le Père de famille*, which remained in the theatre only thanks to the talent of the actor who played Saint-Albin. These two comedies, written in a most overblown

prose, served as models for all the lugubrious *dramas* which have since afflicted our stages.'

*Les Bijoux indiscrets* had appeared in 1748, the *Lettre sur les sourds* in 1751, and *Le Père de famille* in 1758.

- 83 Probably an allusion to the *Réflexions sur l'existence de l'âme et sur l'existence de Dieu*, published in the collection of *Nouvelles libertés de penser*, and quoted in particular in the *Catéchisme [...]* des *Cacouacs*.

- 84 A note to the 1788 edition reads: 'Here is what M. de Voltaire wrote to the author of this strange discourse: 'I have received, sir, your new book against the human species. Never has anyone employed so much wit in an attempt to make us stupid. The reader feels the desire to walk on all fours when he reads your text: however, since it is more than sixty years since I have done so, I believe unfortunately that it will be impossible for me to take on this attitude once more.' N.B. that these most bizarre paradoxes, so degrading to reason, enjoyed then, and perhaps still enjoy now, the title of philosophy. It is therefore true, as Bayle himself recognized, that the abuse of reason leads to madness. The moral aim of the play was to prove this; but since comedy allows for no better argument than ridicule, the new and bold presentation of Crispin walking on all fours produced in the theatres of Paris the effect that it would have produced on the stages of Athens; and truly, French theatre has few examples of such a comic situation.'

Cf. Voltaire's famous letter to Rousseau of August 1755 (D6451).

- 85 A 1788 note reads: 'Pamphlet, now forgotten, but famous at the time thanks to the context. In that strange period when our philosophes formed an alliance with a group of buffoons against French musique, this text was one of their manifestos. This scene, the only one that demands notes, and the only one belonging to the genre of vaudeville, was applauded for its novelty; but the play only being performed for a second run more than twenty years after the first, the author thought it wise to cut this scene, which had become too incomprehensible for the majority of spectators.'

*Le Petit prophète de Boehmischbroda* was a pamphlet pastiching the prophecies of the Old Testament, written by Grimm in 1753 during the *Querelle des Bouffons*.

- 86 A note from 1782 reads: 'All the lines describing Crispin's stance were cut for the second performance [of the 1781 reprise], since at the first a number of loud and clearly important voices were raised with apparent fury at this scene, on the false and ridiculous pretext that it was insulting to the memory of the famous citizen of Geneva. The author preferred to spoil his denouement than to expose the actor performing the role of Crispin to any more slights. We know that in 1760 the same scene, in the hands of the famous Préville, had the most brilliant success; and if the author, forced

to cede to circumstances, thought it necessary to sacrifice himself for a handful of performances, we might imagine that the flattering memory of such a success might have rendered such a sacrifice less painful. But out of respect for the public, and for this earlier support, he not only retains here but will retain in all future editions this most comic situation, to which provincial actors are accustomed, and which will certainly be demanded again one day in the capital.'

87 Palissot's note here reads: 'He takes a lettuce from his pocket.'

88 Cf. the ending of *Le Méchant*, V, ix.

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# About the Team

Alessandra Tosi was the managing editor for this book.

Lucy Barnes performed the copy-editing and proofreading.

Anna Gatti designed the cover. The cover was produced in InDesign using the Fontin font.

Luca Baffa typeset the book in InDesign and produced the paperback and hardback editions. The text font is Tex Gyre Pagella; the heading font is Californian FB. Luca produced the EPUB, MOBI, PDF, HTML, and XML editions — the conversion is performed with open source software freely available on our GitHub page (<https://github.com/OpenBookPublishers>).





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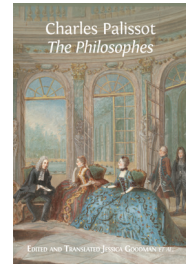
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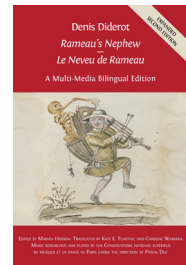
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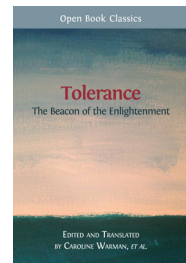


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# Charles Palissot

## *The Philosophes*

EDITED AND TRANSLATED BY JESSICA GOODMAN *ET AL.*

In 1760, the French playwright Charles Palissot de Montenoy wrote *Les Philosophes* – a scandalous farcical comedy about a group of opportunistic self-styled philosophers. *Les Philosophes* emerged in the charged historical context of the pamphlet wars surrounding the publication of Diderot and d'Alembert's *Encyclopédie*, and delivered an oblique but acerbic criticism of the intellectuals of the eighteenth-century Enlightenment, including the likes of Diderot and Rousseau.

This book presents the first high-quality English translation of the play, including critical apparatus. The translation is based on Olivier Ferret's edition, and renders the text into iambic pentameter to preserve the character of the original. Adaptations are further provided of Ferret's introduction and notes.

This masterful and highly accessible translation of *Les Philosophes* opens up this polemical text to a non-specialist audience. It will be a valuable resource to non-Francophone scholars and students working on the philosophical exchanges of the Enlightenment.

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